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Rev J. M'Cosh L.L.D.

With the Authors Compts

THE UNITY OF THE FAITH.

THE UNITY OF THE FAITH

IN ITS RELATIONS TO

James McCook

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE, THE SACREDNESS OF CONSCIENCE,

AND THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST.

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BY THE

REV. ALEXANDER LEITCH,

AUTHOR OF "CHRISTIAN ERRORS INFIDEL ARGUMENTS," "THE GOSPEL AND THE GREAT APOSTACY."

EDINBURGH
ANDREW ELLIOT, 15 PRINCES STREET
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1859

"μεσος απ' αμφοτερων κακον πασχει."

NAZIANZEN.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

PREFACE, ... v

PART I.—AN EXPOSITION.

SECTION I. The Question Stated, ... 3

SECTION II. An Answer Proposed, ... 18

PART II.—A VINDICATION.

DIALOGUE I.

CONCORD AND CONSCIENTIOUSNESS.

I. Conflicting Convictions and Liberty of Conscience, ... 67

II. Toleration and Persecution, ... 80

III. Charity, ... 103

IV. Conscientiousness in Outward Action, ... 114

DIALOGUE II.

THE LIMITS OF IDENTITY OF OPINION.

I. Common Ground and Fundamental Truth, ... 129

II. Things Indifferent, ... 148

III. Love, and the Imperfection of the Human Mind, ... 175

IV. The Primitive Church, ... 190

DIALOGUE III.

THE LIMITS OF VISIBLE UNIFORMITY.

PAGE
I. Is Unity Independent of Uniformity?..... 207
II. Can there be Separation without Schism?..... 223
III. Church Government,..... 237
IV. The Lord's Supper,..... 244

DIALOGUE IV.

ESSAYS ON CHRISTIAN UNION.

I. Dr Balmer's Essay,..... 257
II. The Rev. J. A. James' Essay,..... 274
III. Dr King's Essay,..... 279
IV. Dr Wardlaw's Essay,..... 294

DIALOGUE V.

THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE.

I. No Compromise,..... 310
II. Is the Alliance a Church?..... 340
III. The Organization of the Alliance,..... 358

CONCLUSION.

I. Historical,..... 377
II. Hortatory,..... 405

PREFACE.

The publication of this volume would not have taken place, in all probability, at the present time, except for the recent remarkable religious awakenings in this and other lands, and the general proposal to celebrate the tricentenary of the Scottish Reformation. But the occasion of its publication is not to be identified with the circumstances of its production. The Author's mind has been long and deeply interested in the question of Christian Union; and the greater portion of the present work was actually written, before his attention was attracted either to the modern revival movements, or to the tricentennial anniversary of the Protestantism of his fatherland. When he began to reflect on these occurrences, he almost instinctively resumed his labour at the unfinished manuscript. And now such as it is, though far from being what he desires, and what the subject demands, he ventures to

send it forth, in this solemn crisis of our religious affairs. May the Lord of all not withhold His blessing.

The conception of a revival entertained by many is an effervescence of the affections, a tide of the religious sensibilities, a wave of excitement on the surface of society, a swelling of the Church's bosom. No man, however, can reflect on the subject without perceiving and feeling, that excitement and commotion and awakening are valuable and lasting, only in so far as they are based on knowledge and truth, and directed and controlled by genuine spiritual wisdom.

There are in fact two sorts of Christian revivals. One sort is marked by the carrying home to men's consciences known and recognised truths, so as to lead to practical results. Such in the main was the character of the awakening under Whitfield, the Wesleys, and the Haldanes, and of the recent movement among our American brethren. The gospel, not so much unknown, as forgotten, not so much hidden, as disregarded, is brought from the back ground, enunciated with plainness, and applied with a holy fervid unction. Men begin to consider, and to wonder at themselves, that they should have been so long and so obstinately deaf to these sounds, and blind to these sublime and eternal realities.

The Reformation from Popery in the sixteenth century was, properly speaking, a revival. It was, moreover, the

most marked, and auspicious and extensive revival that the Christian Church has as yet enjoyed. But it was effected, under God, not so much by the practical application of an old or familiar truth, as by the exposition and vindication of a truth, which was fresh and even strange to the religious community of that day. "Justification by faith alone," as proclaimed by Luther, Knox and their compeers, took by surprise the mass of their contemporaries, and was unrecognised by the learned of that age. Yet it was this truth, and it alone, that turned the flank of the papal legions, and led the oppressed and enslaved peoples of Europe to freedom and victory. It burst almost as suddenly as a meteor on the ecclesiastical firmament, and like an omen and instrument of doom, flashed terror on the monastic orders and towering hierarchy of the apostate church; while it proved the early dawn of a revival morning, and the bright harbinger of a moral and religious renovation to the down-trodden multitudes.

This truth, preached by all the heroes of the Reformation, was in one sense new and unexpected and abrupt; but in another sense it was venerable from its very antiquity. It was cherished by the patriarchs when they made their peace with God before the altar. It was the centre of the Mosaic economy. It is emblazoned on the pages of the New Testament. The primitive church lived

upon it, and it never wanted witnesses; for even one of Luther's teachers knew it well. Nevertheless, it was not only partially, but utterly and entirely forgotten, nay, denied and denounced, by the Papal Church three centuries ago. It appears, therefore, that the community may be as truly revived by an increase of knowledge as by an increase of grace—by adding unto faith, knowledge, as by changing a dead into a living faith. The resurrection of a powerful truth from the torpor of centuries forms as genuine a religious awakening, as the pricking of lethargic consciences by an appeal to what is more obvious or ordinary.

The object of the following pages is to expound and defend what seems to be a plain and potent truth,—to protest against its common practical neglect and point out the specious modes in which it is theoretically contradicted,—to advocate its claims to be as old as a Divine revelation,—to plead that, as an essential element of Protestantism, pervading the words of Christ and the writings of His apostles, it be no longer trampled under foot by the men of this generation; and thus to aim at the promotion of a revival of the second sort specified. The Reformers invariably had recourse to argument and discussion, no less than to rhetoric and oratory, to accomplish their work. The Protestant Revival was cradled in controversy, waxed strong by passing through stormy de-

bates, and owed much of its gigantic vigour and proportions to its polemical victories. We have no relish for the asperities of controversy, nor for tempests of angry debate, nor for the dust and turmoil of ecclesiastical dialectics. For nothing have we laboured more, than most rigorously to abstain from every sentiment and expression, that might be found at variance with the devoutest godly fear and the tenderest brotherly love. For every trespass of the kind, into which we shall be found to fall, we will be most deeply grieved.

But we cannot help adding, that the present prevalent feeling against every thing in the shape of discussion or conference among evangelical Christians respecting the points in which they differ, is essentially unprotestant. The horror of religious controversy that pervades some classes of society is a veritable monomania. There is a fashionable and fastidious shrinking from honest and honourable debate and rigorous argumentation, that is nothing less than the treachery of indolence to the dignity of Truth and the authority of the Bible. If our forefathers erred in austerity, and in forgetting love when defending truth, their descendants too often err in laxity, and in degrading Truth when honouring love. If we were all more afraid of perverting Scripture, and more zealous for every Truth of God, than we are, we should be glad to resort to any legitimate and effectual means by

which Truth may be elicited. Few means will be found more successful than friendly conference and amicable discussion.

Some may be inclined to think, that the form into which the argument has been thrown in the second part, is in itself objectionable. Had the body of the work been composed more recently, it is not unlikely that the Dialogue style would have been avoided; although this would have been done more out of deference to the opinions of others whom the Author respects, than in accordance with his own convictions. This style was resorted to solely on the ground, that it was felt to be best adapted to secure the purpose in view. It possesses peculiar facilities for extricating and expounding Truth. That so much is being done to bring forth fresh illustrations and kaleidoscopic views of the old, familiar and elementary truths of the Gospel, is to every pious mind a matter of deepest joy. It is gladdening to the spirit to think that so many efforts are being made to arrest the gay, to awaken the thoughtless and instruct the ignorant, by appealing to their imaginations, exciting their curiosity, and touching their sensibilities. There is surely room also for an effort to find and defend important and neglected Truth. It may not be altogether out of place to write for reflecting and thoughtful Christians. Both the pulpit and the press frequently form too low an

estimate even of the common understanding, and miss the most effectual way of moving the heart. The best feelings are most thoroughly and powerfully stirred by deep and broad views of truth.

There is an urgent call for a revival inside the Christian community as well as outside; and if the fundamental truths of the Gospel be indispensable for the latter, additional knowledge is as indispensable for the former. It is well to see the profane and vicious converted, and the formalists quickened; but God's own people need to be revivified, and for this purpose more light is as necessary as more fire. The genuine disciples of Christ in their present circumstances require more than evangelical doctrine, or hereditary nostrums, or the hackneyed commonplaces of our political and religious sects, to enable them to "quit themselves like men, and be strong." It is at least a worthy aim to seek by temperate discussion for clear and accurate views of that Truth, which the present emergency demands; and thus help the brethren to be "men in understanding," that having experienced the strong and profound feelings, they may perform the heroic actions of "good soldiers of Jesus Christ."

The Literary Dialogue is a powerful instrument, being furnished with a sharp edge, and capable of economising time and space. In selecting it for use, a writer has to run the risk of being charged with temerity for grasping

a weapon which he is unable to wield. Being anxious to discuss the whole question, thoroughly yet briefly, we have had recourse to this hazardous experiment. To exhaust the discussion, as far as practicable, requires not only the examination of the various topics involved in it, but also a review of those authors whose sentiments are opposed. An endeavour has been made to attain both of these ends. Selections from books have been introduced with the view of omitting nothing really relevant to the argument, and at the same time avoiding any misrepresentation of the opinions of their authors.

Although Melancthon had spoken in our own language, instead of using the words of other men, what advantage would have followed? There would, on the contrary, have been a serious drawback; for we might have been accused of setting him up as a man of straw for the empty pleasure of striking him down. Quotations, indeed, might have been added, to vindicate the sentiments and expressions imputed to him; but these must then have been in smaller type, leaving little chance of their being read. It may be questioned whether it be seemly in an author, to set himself off in larger type, than he allows to his friend whose opinions he is controverting. By the plan now adopted, the vindication of our own views is conjoined with a criticism and exposure of the views of others. The latter is as necessary as the former, to give something

like completeness to the work, and to justify its publicity.

It may be averred, that we have done injustice to the authors, from whom we have quoted. The Dialogue form does not at any rate necessitate injustice, which is often grossly committed in the ordinary method of reviewing. It is not our design to review the books and addresses referred to on all their merits, but only so far as they discuss the points to which we desire special attention to be directed. Accordingly, we have laboured to give a fair and honest representation of the sentiments of others, on the precise questions in connection with which their words are introduced. While it has been our constant and earnest aim to avoid any, even the least, infringement of the rules of honourable and Christian argument.

Some readers may be at a loss to understand the exact relation between the Author and the infidel and Popish interlocutors. He holds himself responsible for the correctness of their reasoning. They say what, if they were real parties, they might with perfect propriety and justice be expected to express. But if he were speaking in his own person, he certainly would not always use the language attributed to them, because he is not one of them. They are dramatic characters, and if these characters be consistently sustained, the important design for which they are introduced is accomplished. It were easy, doubtless,

to put into their mouths ungentlemanly remarks; it is equally easy to allow their observations to sink into utter tameness. From offensive extravagance, on the one hand, and from weary dulness, on the other, he has wished to escape, while trying to help Melancthon to see himself as others see him. Let those who think that undue liberty has been used with this respected name, consider the tenor of his conduct in connection with the Confession and Diet of Augsburg.

So far as we may have erred in giving a false impression of others, or transgressed a respectful propriety in what has been attributed to Lord Herbert and Bellarmine, we will be unfeignedly grieved. If a single word has escaped our pen, which is unbecoming our lofty theme, or unjust or ungenerous to the great and good men with whom we have had the hardihood to come into debate, we desire that we could recall it, and cancel it for ever. On being found guilty in this matter, we shall hasten to render every reparation in our power.

It may be observed that some of the principles expounded in a former publication, are in this one occasionally assumed as almost proved, and form the foundation of the present discussion. At the same time, they will receive a new and independent confirmation, so far as the following arguments may be found to be valid. The Dialogues are intentionally constructed in such a manner,

as may enable a careful and candid reader to see more of the real and deep and powerful principles both of Popery and Infidelity, than he will easily learn from some other sources.

The Author does not address those who are ignorant or indifferent about the great theme of our Lord's intercessory prayer. He is throughout writing on the supposition that his readers are most deeply and devoutly impressed with the scriptural injunctions and exhortations, which set forth so calmly and clearly and authoritatively the urgent necessity and holy propriety of Christian Union. The views propounded in the following pages can only be carried into practical effect, under the pervading and intense influence of a high-toned spiritual affection—such a love to the brethren, as can only be compared to the full and fathomless love of Christ Himself. While even a quenchless, self-denying love like this will be found, not unfrequently, at fault and astray, unless it be under the guidance and control of unexceptive and unchangeable principles, such as it is our aim to find and unfold.

"*And Himself gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; to prepare the saints for work of service, for the up-building of the body of Christ: till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man, to the measure of the stature of the*

fulness of Christ: in order that we be no longer children, tossed to and fro and driven about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive: but imbued with truth, that we should in love grow up to Him in all things, who is the Head, the Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by every assisting joint, according to the proportionate energy of every part, maketh increase of itself unto its own up-building in love."—Eph. iv. 11-16.

Lest any one should accuse the author of not acting consistently with his avowed principles, it is proper to state that the following overture was brought by him, before the Presbytery of which he is a member, and was adopted, and transmitted to the Synod.

Overture to the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church from the Presbytery of Carlisle anent Christian Union and the Tricentenary of the Scottish Reformation.

Whereas the Unity of the Faith and the Union of the Christian Church are so reasonably to be expected and so frequently enjoined in Holy Scripture; are found occupying so prominent a place in the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ; are so necessary and conducive to the comfort and edification of the people of God and to the conversion of the world; whereas their attainment and maintenance are thus highly obligatory upon all the professors of Christianity; whereas, therefore, any rupture in the fellowship of Christ's disciples or any breach in the unity of their faith is so sinful in itself, so displeasing to Jesus the King of Saints and the Head of the Church, so disastrous to the Christian Community, and so undutiful and ungenerous to all that do not know or do not obey the Gospel—

And whereas, at this present time, the Evangelical Protestant Church is torn by many discordant and incompatible beliefs and rent into many incongruous and ill-assorted sects and parties, while there is a peculiarly urgent and special call upon them to be of one mind and of one accord in their sentiments and efforts, on account of the vast mass of heathenism yet unevangelized, the subtlety and power and extent of modern Infidelity, the recent policy and progress and boldness of the Great Apostacy, the manifestly unscriptural principles involved in some of the proceedings of the Supreme Government of our native land, and the multitudes of our fellow-countrymen who are notoriously living without God and without hope—

And whereas there are schemes proposed for healing the divisions of Zion, and effecting harmony among the distracted Churches of the Reformation, which, however well intentioned, are not in some respects well founded—

And whereas one great support of schism is found in opposing and irreconcileable interpretations of the Bible, (inasmuch as the chief pretexts and pleas in defence of denominationalism would be extinguished, if jarring doctrines and duties were not drawn from the Word of God), the recognition of the following principles seems to be absolutely necessary, and that without any disparagement to the place and power of charity and brotherly love, for the full accomplishment of a reasonable and scriptural Union among Christians—

That the Bible is throughout in all its declarations perfectly consistent with itself—

That since Protestants do agree in many of the lessons of the Bible, they are able, if they use the right means, to come to an agreement, or at least to avoid contradiction, as to all the doctrines and duties which are enjoined by God—

That since conflicting interpretations of the Bible by those who profess to reverence and obey it as the Word of God are not, therefore, inevitable, but may be avoided, it is apparent that in every instance one or other of the conflicting parties incurs guilt in the sight of the Most High—

That since of every pair of antagonistic interpretations fastened upon the Bible one of them is undoubtedly erroneous, it may be affirmed that so long as such interpretations prevail among Protestants, the glory of their well-worn watchword, that "the Bible, and the Bible alone" is their religion, is sensibly tarnished, if its truth be not seriously impaired—

That the right of private judgment, though a grand and precious privilege, is liable to many grievous abuses, and that this inalienable prerogative of man is surely abused. when the exercise of it in any case leads Christians deliberately to adopt and publicly avow an erroneous belief—

That every apology on behalf of both the parties who find incompatible doctrines or duties in the Bible practically sets aside the authority of the Lord Jesus over his own Church, inasmuch as every false interpretation is virtually either adding to the Word of God, or taking away from its contents—

That every attempt to palliate and excuse the conduct of both parties who plead Scripture against each other, brings reproach and weakness upon the cause of Christianity, for every such attempt implies either that the Bible is in itself defective and even erroneous, or else that the human understanding, though aided by the Holy Spirit, is not trust-worthy; thereby supporting either a fundamental error of Popery, or a fundamental error of infidelity—

And whereas the unprecedented religious awakening in America may well be regarded, not so much as a complete and final blessing, but rather as an instalment and pledge of a richer and more copious effusion of the Holy Spirit, so that many in Protestant Christendom are now anticipating extraordinary times of refreshing and enlargement, and some new and signal development of the Kingdom of Heaven, whereof Christ is the Governor, and which shall not be destroyed—

And whereas the Synod did at its last meeting appoint a Committee, with the view of making arrangements with other denominations to observe the Tricentenary celebration of the Scottish Reformation; and whereas our existing evangelical sects and par-

ties have sprung up subsequently to that revival season from the Lord, at which time, as well as in the primitive ages of the gospel, our present sectarian nomenclature even was unknown, there appears to be a most fit and auspicious opportunity now for the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church to take up with renewed earnestness and expectation the whole question of Christian Union—

It is therefore humbly overtured to the Synod, that they take the premises into their serious and prayerful consideration, and if they shall see cause, declare it to be a fundamental principle, on which all efforts for the promotion of Christian Union should be based, namely, that conflicting and contradictory interpretations of the Word of God may be avoided by Christians; provided they will examine and study the Bible with due care and conscientiousness, and in humble dependence upon the gracious aid of the Promised Spirit of Truth. And, consequently, that in order to attain a sure and healthy union, it is necessary, as it is obviously most becoming, that those Christians, who find opposing doctrines or duties in the Bible, endeavour by prayer and conference, and the large and continual exercise of fervent brotherly kindness and charity, to reduce their differences, till they shall see eye to eye, and be united in the one true meaning of the pure word of the living God—

Finally, if the Synod shall think proper to adopt this declaration, or any other of similar import, that they appoint a Committee to make formal intimation of the same to the other Protestant Evangelical Denominations, inviting them to consider and adopt it also, and to appoint Committees to confer with the Synod's Committee as to further proceedings; and if the Synod are not prepared at this time to adopt the declaration and appoint a Committee, that they recommend the principle embodied in the overture as worthy of public attention in connection with the Tricentenary Celebration of the Reformation in Scotland.

The following is the Minute of Synod in regard to the above:—

"After reasoning, the Synod unanimously approved of the spirit of the overture, and remitted it to the Committee on the Tricentenary

Celebration of the Reformation in Scotland, to avail themselves of such opportunities as may occur in connection with the interesting event referred to, of giving effect in every scriptural way to the known principles of this Church on the subject of Christian union."

Wigton, Cumberland,
2*d November* 1859.

PART I.

AN EXPOSITION.

SECTION I.

THE QUESTION STATED.

The only question in connection with the union of the Christian Church that presents a serious difficulty to the understanding, and calls for laborious and prayerful thought, is this: How is the oneness of the Church compatible, theoretically and practically, with difference and conflict of sentiment among men who are called Christians?

When the question is proposed in this form, there are obviously involved in its statement certain limits, which the answer should distinctly determine. To maintain that Christians need not think alike on any one point whatever, is as extravagant as to maintain that they must think alike on all points without exception. Seeing, then, that it is about equally unreasonable to endeavour to exclude either *all unanimity* of opinion, or *all diversity* of opinion, from the fellowship of Christ's followers, the great problem to be considered and resolved is evidently this: to determine how far *unanimity must* extend, and where *diversity may* begin; or to draw a line such, that on one side of it harmony of opinion must be found, to cement and preserve from dissolution Christian brotherhood, and on

the other side of it variety may be allowed, without any damage to the integrity or cordiality of Christian communion.

Till this problem be distinctly and satisfactorily answered, it seems to be utterly vain to look for the realisation of Christian union in anything like an auspicious form, or on an extended scale. Let us suppose, that in a Christian society which has been established for some considerable time, and been successfully engaged in the prosecution of its high and holy purposes, there arise among its members conflicting sentiments on some important topic of the day. If this society does not clearly know, or has no means of determining with certainty, on which side of the line which has just been specified, the point in dispute lies, they will feel entirely incapacitated on this account to preserve "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." They are constrained from the practical necessities of the case to decide, that the matter in debate is one of such a kind, that collision of sentiment either *is* sufficient, or is *not* sufficient, to break up their religious concord. It is unquestionably a choice of two grave and urgent evils, to decide this point erroneously, or to feel unqualified to decide it at all. Hence any Christian assembly which finds itself reduced to this dilemma, if the finer sensibilities be not very much blunted, will experience keen and poignant distress.

The question as it has now been proposed, however important it may be, does not seem to be hopelessly unmanageable; while the necessity that calls for its solution is equally obvious and pressing. Being unacquainted with any well known and easily accessible work, in which an

unambiguous and determinate answer is given to this question, especially in its bearings on the present condition of Christendom, and having felt our own mind directed to some considerations that appear to us theoretically plain and practically valuable, we do not feel at liberty to withhold them from the scrutiny of our brethren. Such as they are, we now venture to bring them to the bar of public opinion.

There are two different ways in which the union of the Christian Church may be broken. Schism has sprung either from personal animosities or from antagonistic principles. As to the first, there is no theoretical difficulty in discussing or disposing of it, however many or formidable may be the practical difficulties which it involves. When two parties are formed, solely through personal jealousies and individual enmity, without conflicting opinions on any doctrine or duty of Christianity, there is no doubt that guilt is incurred, and that it lies on those who have manifested an unholy temper. The envies and rivalry of partizanship may extend very widely, and work most serious evil, without issuing in the open separation of the Christian society into two permanent sects. When such a separation takes place, however, and distinct organizations are formed, these will be neither extensive nor of long continuance, unless they have something else to sustain them besides *personal* "hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, or strife." Before sects can be consolidated, and transmitted from age to age, and transferred from land to land, pique and estrangement of feeling must have been transmuted into conflicting opinions, or associated in one way or another with marked diversity of

judgment on some general matter of religious faith and practice.

The second way in which two parties may be formed among the disciples of Christ, is by their adopting contrary opinions, on an item of their code or an article of their creed. Opposite judgments have been formed and held, we admit, without either party ceasing to love and respect the other as fellow-disciples, as well as without a palpable separation taking place into two distinct societies. If it were maintained that this should be the case *always*—that whatever diversity of sentiment may arise among the members of one Christian association, such diversity not only should not interfere with the cordiality of brotherly sympathy and affection, but also can never justify an open rupture, then the question of Christian union were most simple and easily disposed of. But the fact is, that conflicting sentiments have not only interrupted and marred the closest Christian intimacy, but have also irresistibly compelled Christian men to separate, and to occupy hostile positions. Moreover, whenever two parties are formed, whether the alienation be merely perpetuated within the same ecclesiastical pale, or whether separate enclosures be formed, there would not be the shadow of a plea either for the prolongation of the strife, or for the erection of another pale, unless on some point of their faith or practice the two parties had come to espouse diverse conclusions.

The great fundamental question which has now been stated, and on the solution of which the attainment of a scriptural Christian union so unambiguously depends, involves in itself several distinct and important elements.

Each of these elements it will be proper to consider singly and by itself. Inasmuch as this union implies unanimity of sentiment on a few matters at least, it is to be inquired, on what conditions can identity of opinion, even to some extent, be secured without any infringement on liberty of conscience or the right of private judgment? Again, since the identity of opinion requisite to union is admitted to be partial and not universal, it has next to be considered, how we are to distinguish between those topics on which identity of opinion is to be held as indispensable, and those other topics in reference to which identity of opinion is regarded as unnecessary. It is not unlikely that there is a close connection between these two inquiries; that is, if we can determine precisely the conditions under which men think freely and yet think alike, we may thereby be assisted in attempting to discriminate the points on which *we ought to agree*, from the points on which *we may differ*.

Yet again, since Christian union, though it does not consist in a punctilious starched uniformity, must be visible and palpable to the world, it has to be further investigated how we shall distinguish a bagatelle of uniformity from an important manifestation of unity. Here also it may be noticed, that success in the two previous inquiries may pave the way for success in this third one. If we can clearly separate the matters in regard to which agreement is essential, from those in which agreement is not essential, we may thereby be aided in distinguishing a trivial nicety of external order from an actual infraction of visible union.

The high problem, then, How shall men think freely,

and act independently, and yet coalesce in a visible and indissoluble harmony—on the solution of which the attainment of an union, that shall not be unworthy to be designated Christian, is undeniably suspended—seems to resolve itself into three distinct, yet mutually related, questions. The first of these may be stated thus: What is the nature of that concord which does not damage the integrity, or limit the exercise, of the strictest conscientiousness? The second question may be put in these words: What are the limits of identity of opinion? or thus, On what topics is identity of opinion to be demanded, and on what topics is it to be dispensed with? The third and last question is this: By what arrangement can Christian union be rendered visible and definite, without insisting upon a needless sameness or similarity in external forms?

We are not prepared to say that these significant questions have not yet received an unembarrassed and conclusive answer. But our present attempt will be fully vindicated, if we can make it manifest, that a clear and satisfactory answer to the above questions is not generally known and appreciated by the Christian community of the present day. Every thoughtful reader will see at a glance how many, and how weighty are the disadvantages under which any Christian society must labour, by whom these questions cannot be resolved at all, or are resolved on erroneous principles. Their solution, therefore, *must* be found. May it be found speedily!

A serious and patent evil, springing from loose and misty views on the points now indicated, will be inability to pronounce with any confidence in what circumstances schism in the Church actually occurs, or on whom its guilt

rightfully falls. We are quite aware that there are many who will see in this fact no detriment or drawback at all, but rather a propitious ignorance favourable to charity and kindly feeling. This were undoubtedly the proper aspect of the case, on the supposition, which in its subtler forms is, we fear, not uncommon, that all the sentiments of every man are just, or nearly so, and that, sometimes at least, it is really necessary, though scarcely magnanimous, to slay truth to save charity from being wounded. But we are not now holding a discussion with masked scepticism. Our argument is not with those who, under the microscopic lens of their false charity, would apply some ingenious edge-tool to the thing called "schism," and pare it gradually away, till first it becomes like a transparent cobweb, and then a gossamer thread, and last of all an almost invisible point. One of the most ominous features in the present condition of the Protestant Churches is the mournful fact, that so many who have the Bible in their hands, and even its open page spread before their eyes, and its telling words sounding in their ears, have managed to bring themselves to think that the *guiltiness* of schism is naught, or next to naught, and that the individual who wishes to save his conscience from its heavy burden and its crimson dye, is scrupulous to a nicety, and a little crotchety in his conscientiousness.

If an ecclesiastical rupture, or a division in the Christian community,—that is, public and party strife, with its sectarian consequences,—be that gigantic and unmitigated evil which it is represented to be in the New Testament Scriptures,[1] there cannot be a surer indication of spiritual

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 3; 2 Cor. xii. 20, 21; Gal. v. 15–21.

dimness, or a sadder manifestation of religious lassitude, than the absence of a clear and precise knowledge of its essential features. If Christian people feel themselves puzzled in attempting to form an accurate conception of what schism is, and consequently cannot with any certainty say, when it occurs, or how it is to be prevented, or how it is to be healed; they will either cease to trouble themselves about the matter at all, and thus sink into sceptical indifference, or they will settle the business hastily and unsatisfactorily, and begin to hurl the bolts of bigotry and fanaticism at random. In no case whatever can guilt be annihilated by the whims or the fancies or the errors of men. Hence, when the heinous guilt of dismembering the body of Christ is *really* incurred in some society, and the party on whom it rests cannot be distinctly specified beyond all reasonable doubt, Christian professors seem to be reduced to the painful necessity of feeling and acting as if there were no alternative left, but either to treat it with a leniency which savours too strongly of the deadly spirit of infidelity, or to impute it with a rashness which betrays the equally fatal temper of spiritual despotism.

That the Protestant Churches are still suffering, as they have for a long time been suffering, deeply and extensively from both these evil tendencies, will be doubted, we think, by few who endeavour to estimate impartially the present posture of affairs. Let any one watch attentively the signs of the times in Reformed Christendom, and he will be surprised to witness so many proofs of a tendency to infidel latitudinarianism on the one hand, and on the other of a leaning to Popish intolerance. Indeed very few seem

to have anything like an accurate or precise notion how to steer clear at once of both these dangers. Consequently, the public mind, in abhorrence of the one, rushes toward the other; and when men feel that they have gone too far in that direction, they return whence they came. They are entangled in both errors, and may be said to oscillate between them, rather than to pursue the high road of truth, leaving the one on the right hand and the other on the left behind.

In no question are both of these false and opposite principles so frequently or so fully displayed, we apprehend, as in the discussions and proceedings that regard the union of the visible Church. There is one strain of argument which yields, and yields again, and would ever yield, surrendering stronghold after stronghold, and fortress after fortress of Truth, avowedly for the sake of forbearance and peace, till at length it would leave nothing to contend for, or nothing worthy of the conflict. When action is taken on this principle, by the very effort to build the temple of brotherly love, its foundations themselves are sapped. There is another mode of reasoning, which, by aiming at too much, runs the risk of losing all. In the conflict with error, it would turn every mole-hill into a *point-d'appui;* and enthusiastically attempting to make the building perfect and symmetrical, according to a foolish model, stone after stone of the living temple is superciliously rejected, so that material is found wanting to complete the edifice.

Of both parties it may commonly be noticed, that neither the one nor the other seems to know where to stop; they have no plain canon or rule to fix their limits. This

is emphatically what both stand in need of, and the one seems to be as destitute of it as the other. The latitudinarian party, when they have once entered on their course, are constrained either to come to a sudden and arbitrary halt, and occupy a temporary post from which the feeblest adversary can easily drive or draw them, or they are forced, in order to maintain a wretched consistency, to relinquish one point after another, till the gospel itself is emasculated of its vigour, and shorn of its glory. The intolerant party, in a similar manner, when they have once fairly got some adherents into marching order, are ever making new and further advances on the liberties of men, till intelligent and free union is choked by the unbending ordinances of a stringent uniformity. The *intellectual error*, in both cases, is one and the same; the one party does not know where to stop in his dispensations, and the other does not know where to stop in his demands. It seems plain as any thing can be, that the knowledge which would guide the one how to limit his concessions, would be equally available to the other in guiding him to find the limit of his claims.

If, *without this knowledge*, any effort be made to repair the breaches of Zion, her wall may be built again by such effort, but it will be built only with untempered mortar. If, without this knowledge, earnest men will attempt to bind up the wound of the daughter of Jerusalem, they may heal it slightly, but her running sore will never be effectually stanched, and her strength restored. What seems to be imperatively needed by the divided Protestant Church, in its present circumstances, is the enunciation and intelligent adoption of some broad and perspicuous

principle, which shall enable us to settle definitely and conclusively the terms of church membership, so as to secure the purity and union of the Church. There is urgently demanded some plain and unexceptionable rule of procedure, by faithful attention to which the Church may steer her course, so as to keep clear of the shoals and quicksands of sceptical indifferentism and free-thinking, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to stand far off from the perilous rocks of religious intolerance and bigotry.

He would be a very heartless Christian, indeed, who could feel contented to leave such a question in an unsettled state, and attempt to congratulate himself merely on the discovery and manifestation of the errors which have arisen in its management. The following pages, therefore, are offered, not simply as an exhibition of the Church's weakness, but chiefly as a contribution towards the solution of what seems to be the very greatest problem of our day. A little advancement may perhaps be made in the right direction, although our observations may not give a final and satisfactory answer even to the *mere intellectual* phase of this long-disputed and transcendently momentous question, How is Christian union attainable? For of this there can be little doubt, that the question, as it has been now stated, and as an investigation purely of the understanding, must receive, sooner or later, a lucid and articulate reply. Till then the association of Christians, one with another, cannot be expected to rest on that consistent and solid basis, which would be a pledge at once for the symmetrical erection, and for the enduring grandeur, of the Living Temple of Evangelical Concord.

Nor are we enthusiastic enough to dream, that even

when the problem, in its intellectual aspect, shall have been fairly and for ever set at rest, no more will be needed to secure the blissful consummation of an united Church, and, as its consequence, of a converted world. However difficult it may sometimes be to find truth, it is often much more difficult to act upon the truth when found. However difficult it may be to discover or point out the channel in which love should flow, it is often much more difficult to fill that channel with an overflow of genuine affection. It appears to us that presumptuous sin may be correctly defined to consist in man's not acting according to the *truth which he knows*. By the application of this principle, the mass of the heathen world will be condemned; and on no other principle could they with justice be found guilty, and finally doomed. The application of the same principle to the inhabitants of Christendom would involve too many in a severer condemnation; for the more we know, the longer account we have to render. The copious source of evil *in* the Church, as well as *out* of it, is just this, that men will not walk by the light which they enjoy. Protestant schisms are far more numerous and malignant than they would be, if Protestants would "obey the truth," with which even now they are familiar; if they would cultivate, in a practical form, mutual love, according to their present knowledge. This giant mischief is to be overcome, not so much by argument as by exhortation. This demon of strife is to be exorcised, not so much by the printing press as by prayer. It is the proper work of the pulpit, the platform, and the prayer-meeting, to stimulate and induce Christian men fully and constantly to act up to the truth, which is generally known and recognised in the community of the

faithful. Oh! that it would please the Most High God to send, at this time, a pentecostal blessing on His own Church, and grant a new and a large instalment towards the full accomplishment of His promise,—"I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh."

When an attempt, however, like the one which we now essay, is made to open up new ground, to determine a controverted question, and to extend the boundaries of commonly acknowledged truth, the adventurer finds the appropriate means in a published treatise. Every effort of this sort must be based upon the deep conviction, that notwithstanding the many who in practice disregard their perceptions of truth, there are others, considerable in number, influential in position, and still more influential in character, who, to an earnest endeavour *to hold the truth in righteousness*—that is, to obey the truth whereto they have already attained—add an humble and honest desire to know the truth more and more—*who receive the love of the truth.* To the scrutiny of such minds we commit the results of our investigation, believing that whatever portion of truth may be developed, it will find a cordial reception in congenial hearts, and, under the blessing of the Lord, bear its appropriate part in hastening the reformation of the Church and the remodelling of the world.

We here append an extract from Sir William Hamilton's Lectures, as it not only expresses very forcibly the frame and temper of mind in which the question that has now been stated should be discussed, but also indicates the principle on the application of which the solution of that question depends. Speaking of the dispositions with which Philosophy ought to be studied (Lect. 5), he says:—"In the

first place, then, all prejudices—that is, all opinions formed on irrational grounds—ought to be removed. A preliminary doubt is thus the fundamental condition of philosophy; and the necessity of such a doubt is no less apparent than is its difficulty. We do not approach the study of philosophy ignorant, but perverted. 'There is no one who has not grown up under a load of beliefs—beliefs which he owes to the accidents of country and family, to the books he has read, to the society he has frequented, to the education he has received, and, in general, to the circumstances which have concurred in the formation of his intellectual and moral habits. These beliefs may be true, or they may be false; or, what is more probable, they may be a medley of truths and errors. It is, however, under their influence that he studies, and through them, as through a prism, that he views and judges the objects of knowledge. Every thing is therefore seen by him in false colours, and in distorted relations. And this is the reason why philosophy, as the science of truth, requires a renunciation of prejudices (præ-judicia, opiniones præ-judicatæ)—that is, conclusions formed without a previous examination of their grounds.'—(Gatien-Arnoult.) In this, if I may, without irreverence, compare things human with things divine, Christianity and Philosophy coincide—for truth is equally the end of both. What is the primary condition which our Saviour requires of his disciples? That they throw off their old prejudices, and come with hearts willing to receive knowledge, and understandings open to conviction. 'Unless,' He says, 'ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Such is true religion; such also is true philosophy. Philosophy requires an emancipation from the yoke of foreign authority, a renunciation of all blind adhesion to the opinions of our age and country, and a purification of the intellect from all assumptive beliefs. Unless we can cast off the prejudices of the man, and become as children, docile and unperverted, we need never hope to enter the temple of philosophy. It is the neglect of this primary condition which has mainly occasioned men to wander from the unity of truth, and caused the endless variety of religious and philosophical sects. Men would not submit to approach the Word of God in order to receive from that alone their

doctrine and their faith ; but they came in general with preconceived opinions, and, accordingly, each found in revelation only what he was predetermined to find. So, in like manner, is it in philosophy. Consciousness is to the philosopher what the Bible is to the theologian. Both are revelations of the truth,—and both afford the truth to those who are content to receive it, as it ought to be received, with reverence and submission. But as it has, too frequently, fared with the one revelation, so has it with the other."

SECTION II.

AN ANSWER PROPOSED.

I.

The first of the three questions, on the solution of which the accomplishment of a Christian union,—that is, a free, manly, catholic union,—is dependent, may be given thus: *How shall concord be visible and unbroken, while every man's conscientiousness is left to spontaneous and unfettered activity?*

To assert that the claims of conscience and the completion of union are theoretically irreconcileable, (as, alas! they have hitherto too generally been found to be practically incompatible), is to take up a position which, if it were consistently adhered to, would prove fatal to Christianity and to all truth. It is, in fact, the stronghold of the most desperate unbelief. When multitudes of men are allowed free and full play in exercising the right of private judgment, especially on such a subject as religion, to suppose that it is utterly vain to expect that there will be, to any considerable extent, unanimity of sentiment and harmony of action, is not only to proclaim war between conscience and truth, but even to legalise the

conflict. It matters not whether conscience or truth be the first to fall in the strife; the fall of either is equally fatal, and irretrievably fatal.

Again, to regard the compatibility of a sensitive conscientiousness with the consummation of Christian union, as *even a questionable* point, which is open to doubt and discussion, is implicit infidelity in one of its subtlest and most deleterious forms. To pretend a calm and wise uncertainty whether there be such a thing as truth at all, or whether the honest and diligent inquirer can find ought worthy of his search, and satisfying to his soul, is like breaking the compass or unshipping the rudder of a noble vessel, or unnerving those who man her.

These positions are so plainly right, that it is generally admitted by the Christian community, at least formally and in so many words, that there is no incongruity or antagonism between the most unrestrained conscientiousness, and the most complete unanimity. But when inquiries are made as to what is meant by complete unanimity, some vague reply is given, such as this,—the utmost unanimity that is desirable or attainable. And when the matter is probed still further, and we venture to ask, what amount of unanimity is attainable or desirable, the number of diverse answers that are returned only serves to stun our ears and to stagger our reason. Almost the only impression left upon the mind in the midst of this confusion is something of this sort: The great principle which affirms a harmony between the claims of individual consciences and the realization of social union, and which, we thought, had been immovably established, *seems* to be shivered into pieces before our eyes, and its broken

fragments to be strewed about us, bewildering our judgment, and grieving our heart.

The principle under discussion has either no meaning at all, or will most surely mislead us, unless, in speaking of conscience, we mean, *conscience rightfully used*, and, in speaking of concord, *concord fairly expounded*. It is under this condition alone, that it can be maintained, that there is no variance or conflict between the exercise of conscience and the accomplishment of concord. Two inferences are deducible from the principle as thus understood, which are practically invaluable. The first is, *that the concord which is attained without the due and legitimate employment of conscience, is not a proper or normal concord*. The second inference is equally plain, though commonly disregarded, namely, *that when concord is not secured, but is obviously ruptured and lost, there must have been an unlawful and culpable exercise of conscience*. While the principle now before us, therefore, may be readily acknowledged and boasted of, in words and in appearance, it may be really and disastrously set aside or trampled on in two distinct ways. Some aim at concord to the injury of conscience; while others plead for conscience to the injury of concord.

It hence appears, that whenever ecclesiastical union is secured in any other way, than by the free and independent choice, the intelligent and willing acquiescence individually, of those who are united, it is not of a genuine kind. In so far as the members of a church are kept together by the fear of change, or by respect for antiquity, or by the ties of property, or by hereditary prepossessions, or by the force of earthly authority, or by

any other such bonds, not to speak of baser ones, to the same extent their union as Christians is defective or damaged. When men are of one mind and of one heart, because they agree in the truth, which they have found after an honest and unbridled search, that is Christian conscientious union. The notion of effecting, preserving, or restoring union in religion, by fear or force in one form or another, long pervaded the minds of the leading men in Christendom; and it is painful as well as notorious, that most of the early Reformers themselves were more or less entangled in this misconception.

Latterly, however, the majority of Protestants seem to have been going over to the other extreme. If union was everything formerly; conscientiousness is everything now. Conscience has been often made a sacrifice to union; now union is made a sacrifice to conscience. Is not the mind of the Protestant community deeply imbued with some such sentiment as this: thorough and extensive union is a hopeless attainment amid the conflicts and confusion entailed by the workings of conscientiousness? If any opinion is more surely believed among us than another, or more oracularly delivered from platform, press, and pulpit, is it not one that might be put into words thus: The vigorous exercise of conscientious deliberation and judgment on every question is one of the most serious difficulties in the way of intimate Christian fellowship and universal philanthrophic co-operation? We appeal to those who believe that Christian union—the visible union of those who accept Christ as their Saviour—is both a duty and a blessing, if such sentiments as the above are not pregnant with unmistakeable infidelity? To admit or

insinuate in any degree that the fullest attainment of Christian union, as it is enjoined in the New Testament, is in any way prevented, or its possession and security endangered, by the most strictly conscientious search after truth, is to reduce us to the dread dilemma of scepticism;—that either there are no such realities as truth and virtue in the world, or they are denied to man. One trembles, and feels as if his faith were beginning to be shaken, when he finds himself insensibly drawn by the prevalent arguments and representations of his Christian brethren, very near to the verge of the yawning gulf of unbelief.

When the untrammelled exercise of private judgment is spoken of as a difficulty or obstacle in the way of reaching that degree of Christian combination which is admitted to be desirable, and whose realization is to be ultimately expected, this exercise of private judgment must be a proper or an improper one. For surely no one will contend that Conscience and Reason are not liable to be abused by Christians as well as by other men, and on religious questions as well as on any question whatsoever. It is very obvious, therefore, that an illegitimate use of the understanding, a feigned or counterfeit conscientiousness, may prove an impassable barrier in the way of Christian union. The plea of conscience, *disingenuously urged*, is, indeed, a difficulty—a real and insuperable difficulty. Such a disingenuous plea, however, involves *guilt*—the very guilt which is characteristic of schism. To whatever extent, therefore, schism prevails among Christians, to the same extent most certainly reason and conscience are not diligently used, or grievously perverted. For as union by

compulsion is proof of a languid, slumbering, torpid conscientiousness in the Church, so surely does a disjointed shattered Church prove the existence of a feverish, morbid conscientiousness in its members. If, in any circumstances, "a man proves unfaithful even for the faith, and sacrilegious for religion," it surely is when he deceives himself, and pleads a conscientiousness which he does not possess.

When reason is not misused, when conscientiousness is not pretended, but genuine, to suppose that then it can in any measure stand in the way of a most thorough and cordial union, is surely inadmissible. Yet this is the very principle which is assumed, when it is maintained that there may be a separation and division in a Christian society without either party incurring the guilt of schism. This opinion is defended on the ground that both parties may act from conscientious motives. The excellent men, who have asserted that an open rupture in Christian fellowship may take place and be continued without guilt, on the ground that both parties in coming to conflicting conclusions have followed conscience, have little considered the import of their statement. If men may contradict each other's views, as Protestants have contradicted each other times without number, and it be admitted that *neither of them is resorting to the plea of conscience unwarrantably*, then we fear that the Church of Christ is bemired inextricably in the slough of despond. She is, by this admission, for ever deprived of any effective means, whereby to dispel the delusions of infidelity, or to disinfect the abominations of Popery. If, *in a single instance*, the plea of conscience can justify the institution of two

separate and unconnected, not to say rival or hostile Christian societies in one neighbourhood, then is the great principle of the compatibility of conscientiousness and concord abandoned, and the claims of Christian unity and truth are sacrificed to the empty vapouring of a spurious conscientiousness.

If the Romanist has erected a high and irregular wall around the sheep-fold, which affords more facilities to the hireling and the wolf than protection to the sheep, has not the Protestant been covering the pasturage with a score of little pens destitute alike of security and arrangement? What vast difference is there between these two parties, especially since each of them, in following his own fond device, has been destroying or disregarding the only sure and symmetrical, because divinely-instituted, fence of the fold? It can make but very little difference in the final issue of events, whether we form a procrustean bed of pretended union, and thereon rack and torture unto spiritual death the consciences of men; or, making an effigy of conscientiousness our idol, in the madness of our zeal break into pieces, as an offering before it, the Church—the body of the Lord Jesus. We are at a loss to perceive what advantage there is, in *protesting* against the despotism that would bind the thinking soul in the chains of an iron uniformity, when immediately thereafter, in the license and licentiousness of our thoughts, we rudely snap the very bands of truth, and heartlessly sever the tenderest cords of love!

Whoever, then, maintains that there is no opposition or incongruity between the exercise of conscientiousness and the establishment of Christian union, must, in order

to be consistent with himself, likewise maintain that an honest and earnest conscientiousness, far from being, or producing, any impediment to the fullest development of Christian harmony, is one chief means by which it is to be perfected. Consequently, *when Christian union is in any way interrupted, or marred, or broken, one cause of the evil will invariably be found to be a defective or distorted conscientiousness in one or other of the parties.* This inference cannot be disproved by the fact, that both parties vociferously and dogmatically urge the plea of conscience.

The conflicting sentiments of Protestants are the only or principal source of their endless sects. Of every pair of these conflicting sentiments, *one* of them must be held to be *erroneous*. Hence it follows, that if two conflicting sentiments may be adopted conscientiously by both parties, conscientiousness is incompatible with union, and leads men to error as readily as to truth. But if conscientiousness does not deceive us, and if an upright conscience and concord be compatible, then an erroneous judgment that causes a separation among Christian brethren cannot, in the very nature of things, be, in the only proper sense of the word, conscientiously espoused.

Such being the real state of the case, to be told by some who set themselves forth as the expounders and defenders of Protestantism in its purity, that "the existence of sectarianism is a proof of moral integrity," (Poulter on Puseyism, p. 173), involves an extravagance of subtle unbelief, as false and dangerous as any of the absurdities either of Popery or infidelity. An extreme opinion like this would not have been hazarded, if it were not in unison with the

prevailing sentiments of the age. The existence of sectarianism may be a proof of moral integrity in *one* of the parties, but cannot, by any possibility, be evidence of such integrity in both of two conflicting sects. This latter is plainly what is often meant by such assertions.

II.

The second question which we are called to consider is, What are the limits of identity of opinion? This question is commonly supposed to be satisfactorily answered by the well-worn adage: in things necessary, unity; in things indifferent or unnecessary, liberty; in all things, charity. This statement is obviously of no practical use whatever, unless we know what things are necessary, and what things are indifferent. Nay, to plead this maxim, so long as we cannot discriminate between things indifferent and necessary, is worse than useless; for in that case it only adds confusion to confusion, by *appearing* to solve a difficulty, which in reality it *does not* solve. Now there are two ways in which things necessary might be distinguished from things indifferent; there might be an actual specification of each of them respectively, or some plain rule might be given to enable every man to make the distinction for himself when called to do so in the exigency of circumstances.

As to the first of these, or a detailed statement of the things themselves that are necessary and that are indifferent, we are acquainted with none that requires to be noticed in this place. It is sufficient now to offer a few general observations to the reader's reflection, which will

tend to manifest the impracticability of every attempt to make out the distinction in a satisfactory manner.

"Things indifferent," in the estimation of the individual who adheres to the distinction in question, will either include *propositions which he knows to be true*, or will invariably exclude all such propositions. Whichever side of this alternative is adopted, a very obvious and grave difficulty presents itself. If you allow a matter to be "indifferent," which at the same time involves in your own judgment the obligation of duty, or the importance and immutability of truth, what do you mean by styling it *indifferent?* Your language is liable to misconstruction, and surely needs to be more explicit. On the other hand, if you include in "things necessary" every thing which is true, and demand actual and avowed unity in all these as the condition of church-fellowship, you grasp an instrument which, according to the temper and the circumstances of those who wield it, will either crush into the dust the consciences of men, or shatter to pieces the concord of the Church. If you call *any one true* thing "indifferent," you are on the slippery slope of infidelity; if you make *all true* things "necessary," you are erecting an altar to bigotry.

To escape from this dilemma, it will be said, by things indifferent and necessary, we mean not things indifferent and necessary as regarded in themselves, but such as are so in regard to *a man's personal salvation.*

The distinction as thus interpreted seems to us to involve two consequences, both of which we cannot but regard as unsound and disastrous. In the first place, it seems to imply that of all the truths within the reach and

cognisance of a man, some of them are indifferent to his personal salvation, and that it is easy to distinguish such from those that are necessary to his salvation. Now the Bible, while emphatically testifying that sinners enjoy peace with God when exercising faith in Christ, never speaks of any truth as indifferent to our personal and eternal salvation, but invariably urges us to increase and grow in knowledge. This, then, is not a scriptural distinction. While those who hold to it cannot in any individual case pretend to draw the line accurately, and are constrained to admit that what they might consider indifferent to one would not by any means be indifferent to another. In the second place, the distinction, as it has just been explained, will imply that *all the truth* which the Church is at any time called upon to maintain and disseminate in her character as the Church of Christ, is *only that amount of truth, and no more,* which is affirmed to be necessary for the salvation of any, the poorest and lowest individual of the race. Granting that it were no arduous business to determine correctly and clearly what those truths are, which are represented as absolutely indispensable to the salvation of one of the million, will it be asserted that every thing else besides these is trivial and destitute of all significance and weight, even to the individual himself, and far less to the Church at large? When the Bible describes "the Church of the living God" as "the pillar and ground of the truth," are we to understand "the truth" here spoken of, as that truth only which is supposed to be essential to the salvation of a slave or a Hottentot, to the exclusion of all other truth?

Let us take the case of Abel or of Joseph in remote antiquity, or of a Caffre or a Hindu who has but recently emerged from the gloom of centuries into the daylight of Christianity. Supposing that the truths necessary to be believed by such persons in order to eternal life could be settled and determined beyond dispute, are these truths to be regarded as the whole of the inheritance of the Christian Church? Is it these truths, and these alone, which the Church of the nineteenth or of the twenty-first century is to hold fast, and hold forth to the world? Is it these truths, and these alone, just as they were apprehended and appreciated by Isaac or by the first Indian convert, a belief of which, and of *nothing more*, is to be declared essential to the salvation of a man, who has been trained in an English or American congregation under an able and devout ministry? All such notions as these are not only utterly incongruous, but also extensively detrimental. To tell any one that he knows already quite enough, and that more knowledge is altogether unnecessary to his everlasting salvation, is to administer a spiritual opiate, and pander to spiritual sloth. It were easy to shew of any given truth which might be selected, that while there are some men in whose case a belief in that truth might be reasonably affirmed to be necessary to their salvation, there are other men regarding whom this assertion could not with justice be maintained. Can it be affirmed even of a heathen who never had an opportunity of hearing the gospel, that belief in Christ is essential to *his* salvation? Who is bold enough to consign to endless woe a brother man, *solely and exclusively*, on the

ground that he has never listened to the glad tidings of great joy?[1]

Some may now feel disposed to say that a meaning has been put upon the word "indifferent," which it was never intended to bear. What, then, does it mean? If it does not indicate naked and absolute indifference, it can only mean a *less degree* of necessity or importance. If this be assumed as its import, we are as far as ever from the goal. In order to apply this distinction to answer the question, what are the limits of identity of opinion in the Christian Church?—we shall want two helps, neither of which we know where to find. We shall want, in the first place, a sliding scale whereby to measure the various degrees of importance that may exist, for in various degrees of necessity we have no belief. And, in the second place, we shall require a teacher (an infallible one, if possible) to inform us at what point in this scale the so-called necessity ends, and the so-called indifference begins.

We thus perceive that there is no likelihood of finding any general rule, or explicit canon, by which we may be guided in attempting to discriminate between things essential and things indifferent. Hence any detailed enumeration of the things themselves supposed to be embraced in these two classes, will be far from precise, or clearly inaccurate. The maxim which we have been considering, therefore, seems to be one of that delusive kind which are too frequently

[1] "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word."—The Conf. of Faith, ch. x. iii.

current in society, whose very might lies in their mistiness. Men are ever ready to grasp the shadow of truth, rather than take the trouble to seek the substance. The terms "necessary" and "indifferent" are not so explicit in themselves as they ought to be; nor are they so obviously co-relative, or mutually exclusive, as might be expected. Besides, we have seen that the knowledge which may with propriety be said to be necessary to one man's salvation, cannot be said to be necessary to the salvation of another man. It is also more than doubtful, whether the truths that might with some plausibility be regarded as necessary to salvation, are precisely those identical points on which harmony of opinion is required, in order to secure a substantial and obtrusive Christian union.

We would not dismiss this part of the subject, without attempting to give an answer to the all-important question. What is necessary to salvation? For our own sakes, for the sake of our argument, and for the sake of our readers, this unspeakably momentous point should be dealt with plainly and explicitly. First, then, the *objective* ground or reason on which alone salvation is within the reach of any individual man, whether he be heathen or Christian, whether he be an infant or an adult, an ante-diluvian or a post-diluvian, is one and the same, namely, the atoning sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly, the *subjective* condition of each one's personal and eternal salvation consists in honestly and diligently seeking to know as much truth as possible, and endeavouring, with equal honesty and diligence, to act up to the truth when found. The subjective condition of obtaining peace with God, or a present salvation, is believing in Jesus Christ our

Lord. If you can meet a heathen, a man living in the very deepest darkness of idolatry, who is loving and obeying the truth within his reach, it will be as hard to condemn him, as it is easy to condemn those professing and highly-favoured Christians whose mental indolence and facile conscientiousness prove that they are *not* "of the truth."

We must now return to the question that led us into this discussion, namely, What are those matters on which identity of opinion is essential to cement Christian men together in one society, as distinguished from those other matters on which identity of opinion may be dispensed with?

The answer to this inquiry will be more readily found, by stating the question itself in a more precise form. The remarks which have been already made tend to shew that the chief cause or occasion of permanent ecclesiastical schisms is the presence of conflicting sentiments or antagonistic judgments among Christians. The main difficulty, therefore, in answering the question proposed is, how to avoid these intellectual conflicts, or how to deal with them when they unhappily occur. The question now before us, accordingly, is, properly speaking, threefold in its nature. 1. What are those matters on which a *positive* identity of opinion, *an actual and avowed agreement*, in the exercise of free and earnest thoughtfulness, is necessary to Christian union? 2. What are those matters on which there must be a *negative* identity of opinion, *an absence of contradictory sentiments*, so as to prevent the rupture of the unity based on the positive identity of opinion? 3. What are those matters on which there may be *that diversity* of opinion which does not amount to contradiction?

Whether the above be in some measure a correct and thorough mode of stating the question, may be tested by appealing to facts with which every one is familiar. 1. Every page of church history proves that before there can be anything like Christian combination and fellowship, there must be a felt agreement on certain great leading truths. 2. When this agreement is experienced, and confederation follows as a matter of course, separation has taken place, again, and again, and again, and inevitably so, because of the adoption of *opposite* views on some *one* particular point. 3. Every Christian society knows that there are many things on which diversity of sentiment is not felt to necessitate, and does not, in fact, produce separation.

The formation of a church has always pre-supposed, as in the nature of the case it must do, palpable and unambiguous concord of sentiment on several important matters. While this concord of sentiment is exhibited by practical incorporation, sympathy, and co-operation, *one sort* of question may arise, on which conflicting views will issue, and properly and necessarily issue, in rending the Christian society into two hostile portions; and *another sort* of question may arise, diversity of sentiment regarding which shall in fact leave, as it ought in fairness to leave, the Christian society, undisturbed, or at least unbroken. It seems, then, to be beyond dispute, that there cannot be any Christian organization at all without a distinct and avowed creed; and, further, that there are matters on which a conflict of judgment will shatter this organization into pieces; while there are other matters on which variety of opinion will allow this organization to continue unaltered and unshaken.

We shall take the last of the three questions first. To

answer it, a distinction will be found available, which all may comprehend, and none, we think, will doubt. Every man can appreciate the difference between those statements or propositions which he clearly and certainly knows to be true or erroneous, and those others about which he knows something, but not enough to warrant their full acceptance or unqualified rejection. To distinguish the one sort from the other, let us call the one *certain*, and the other *probable*. The answer, therefore, to the third question may be given thus: *Diversity of sentiment on matters of probability need not interfere with Christian union either in marring brotherly love, or in rending social combination.*[1]

Probabilities do not directly oppose or destroy each other. There is, therefore, appropriate scope in their sphere for variety of sentiment; for this variety will never emerge in a distinct and peremptory contradiction. In such affairs it is not unreasonable to require, that a minority of any number of associated persons should submit to the majority, when a practical decision is called for in pursuing any of the principal objects of the association. Submission and acquiescence in such cases is obviously necessary to secure the preservation and efficiency of the society. For example, when two individuals are proposed to fill some office, the difference among those who have the privilege of voting, though one of unqualified opposition as regards persons, is, generally, not one of direct antagonism

[1] If any one should scruple to accept the above proposition, will any Protestant object to the following one? Diversity of sentiments on matters, *which are left undecided by the word of God*, should not interfere with Christian union, either in marring brotherly love, or in rending social combination.

as regards *principles*. The two candidates may be acknowledged by both parties to be well qualified for the appointment; but the one candidate seems to one of the parties, and the other candidate to the other party, to have superior acquirements and higher claims. Moreover, neither of the parties may be prepared to affirm, positively and dogmatically, that their own man is really the better of the two. In most cases of this kind, it is a matter of probability, and not of certainty, which of the candidates will really, and in the end, turn out to be the best office-bearer. We may feel perfectly and justly certain, so far as our knowledge goes, in *preferring* James to Thomas; but this preference does not amount to the declaration that we indubitably know that James would actually and ultimately prove the better of the two.

If any one will argue that it is quite possible that one of the candidates might, in point of fact, be really better qualified than the other, and that this fact might be clearly enough known to his supporters, and that, therefore, a fair contradiction emerges, it may be replied thus: It is improper to call such diversity a contradiction or antagonism of sentiment, because it is only a contrast between what is wise, and what is wiser, and not the opposition of right to wrong, or of truth to error. In such a case the contrariety involves only the degrees of good, better, and best: for both parties are supposed to be acting rightly, seeking proper ends by suitable means, but only the one party is more prudent than the other. The contradiction which is properly so called, and involves a matter of truth and error, or of right and wrong, is surely not only of a much more serious character, but also of a very different nature.

For example, the proposal of a notoriously and grossly immoral individual, to fill the office of the Christian ministry, presents a totally diverse case from the one formerly supposed. Here the man is clearly and positively *dis*-qualified for the situation; and, consequently, if some of the voters support him, while others shall prove faithful, an important and real contradiction will be evolved, and a separation will be, or ought to be, the consequence.

Let us take another example for illustration,—the question of church government. *Under certain conditions* this question can be conceived to be one of mutual forbearance, in which a minority should yield to a majority. Thus, with diverse views, and various predilections for Presbyterianism, Independency, and Episcopacy, the visible unity of the Christian society might be undamaged. If the form of church government be left open and undecided in holy Scripture, and if the sentiments of different Christians amounted to no more than a preference on grounds of probability of one mode of ecclesiastical rule over another, then it would be the undoubted duty of Christians in the same locality to associate with each other, and allow the external form of their organisation to be determined by the majority; just as a majority is supposed to be fully competent to decide the site where a place of worship is to be built, and what shall be its size and its shape.

Leaving, then, ample room for diversity of sentiment on matters of probability, we proceed to the examination of the second point, namely, on what topics must there be found the absence of contradiction to preserve the harmonious union of a Christian society? The answer is

suggested by the remarks which have been already made. *There cannot exist undisturbed Christian sympathy or unbroken unity, except by the exclusion of all conflicting or antagonistic opinions when truth and error, or right and wrong, are implicated.* When Christian directly opposes Christian on some point of duty, or on some principle of faith, to fancy that such a mutual opposition may develop itself in the bosom of the Church without producing the veritable phenomenon called schism, with all its evil and guilt, is a specimen of that excessive credulity which some have imagined is found only in sceptics. This schism may obviously be either an inward disease, leaving the outside shell of visible union unbroken, while eating within as doth a canker; or it may asssume the appearance of an external sore, speedily becoming prurient and ulcerous. To under-estimate the malignant blight of such a schism in either of its aspects, or attempt to palliate its guiltiness, as lying upon one or other of the parties, is a grievous departure from the simplicity of the gospel, and seems to us to be one of the besetting sins of the Christian community of this age.

The question of church government recently alluded to will afford an apt illustration. A specific scheme of ecclesiastical organisation is either distinctly and authoritatively laid down in the New Testament for the guidance of Christians, or it is not. This affirmation no one will deny. When, therefore, one party asserts that a scheme of church polity is so laid down or enacted, and another party maintains that no such scheme is set forth at all, a pretty large amount of distrust and disaffection will inevitably arise, even though it should not come to an open

rupture. Will it be asserted, or can it be imagined, that Christian men who profess to be "born again," to have "the eyes of their understanding enlightened," and to be led by the spirit of truth, with the Bible in their hands, which is "a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path"—will err in such circumstances and on such a topic unavoidably and innocently? Is it no fault for Christ's disciples to maintain, that their Master *has* ordained a precise form of church order, if in fact He has not? Is it no transgression to maintain that He has not made any such ordinance, if in fact He has? Whoever decides this point erroneously, must be regarded as culpable and blameworthy in no small degree. When such a conflict of judgment occurs in a company of Christians, the most uneasy feelings will spring up; which, if they do not lead to an immediate separation, will probably gather strength by being denied ventilation, and ultimately produce an angry and violent rupture.

Let us pursue this illustration a little further, and assume for the sake of our argument, that there is a *divinely instituted* form of church government and order in the New Testament. Can it be imagined that this heaven-ordained form is presented to us in the word of God so vaguely and loosely, that *really* conscientious readers of the law in which it is embodied may come to conflicting conclusions as to its nature? To hold such an opinion is surely, and without much ambignity or hesitancy, to asperse the great Law-giver himself. When Christian men plead holy Scripture for *incompatible* schemes and doctrines, and add that they do it *conscientiously*, our reply is: "Let God be true and every

man a liar." It is better to hold that one party at least is pleading conscience disingenuously, than to lose faith in God, the creator of conscience and the author of the Bible.

We may take another case. One brother affirms that for the civil government of a country to use means and expend public money to instruct its subjects in religion is a *sin*, and another brother affirms that it is a *duty*. To believe that these two brethren have come to these conflicting conclusions by a *strictly conscientious* examination of the question, is to abandon all faith both in conscience and in truth. In this and every similar instance the alternative is before us, either to float down the stream with the tide of infidelity and leave all the treasures of truth behind, or boldly to charge one or other of the parties with error and disingenuousness, and as a consequence, with the crime of schism. The practical inference from this statement is invaluable; truly godly and conscientious men should leave no effort untried, by prayer, diligence, and humility, to avoid these collisions with each other. To proclaim that these collisions involve no criminality on either side, as is the fashion of our day, is a form of infidelity that is laying waste the garden of the Lord.[1]

[1] Some readers may be curious to know what are the author's views on the controverted questions adduced in illustration. His views on these questions are not of the slightest consequence in the present argument. Let reviewers know, those of them at least who will read thus far, (for one form of unconscientiousness is to review books after skimming a few pages, and sometimes without reading them at all), that the author does not maintain that *those who are opposed to him* on any point under discussion are in error; but that *either himself or his opponent* is wrong and deficient in sincerity on that point.

It now appears, that when antagonistic views, such as those that have been specified, arise among the associated brethren of a Christian society, it is as impracticable to debar heartburnings, alienations, and open divisions, as it is impossible to deny that there is error and guilt in one or other of the two parties. The impracticability of preventing the evil, and the impossibility of doubting the guilt, mutually explain each other. Accordingly, whenever an explicit contradiction arises among the members of a church on a weighty matter of doctrine or duty, to maintain that both parties may be conscientious and innocent, and that Christian union is not thereby *ipso facto* disturbed and broken, is to unsettle and overthrow by a single stroke the veracity of reason and the authority of revelation. For one or other of them is thereby rejected; *and we know not which.* If the Bible does not speak plainly enough for honest men to understand it, let us forthwith recant our Protestantism; if when the Bible speaks plainly enough for honest men to understand it, we have not intelligence enough to perceive its meaning, let us exchange Popery for the most naked unbelief. It is dangerous surely to let go our hold of reason in a spasmodic effort to grasp a written revelation more firmly, or to abandon a written revelation lest we make shipwreck of reason; but in the very same moment and by one act to surrender them both, or let them slip, is an extravagance reserved for this enlightened age. It is on this perilous, this pernicious assumption, that the Protestant Churches of our day are complacently reposing.

That the existence of our different denominations, based though they be on contradictory judgments in regard to

matters of importance contained in the Word of God, does not necessarily violate the visible unity of the Church, nor impeach the sincere conscientiousness of either of the conflicting parties—is an opinion oracularly delivered and implicitly received in modern Israel, from Dan to Beersheba. Yet when it is closely examined, it does appear to be a Pandora's box, filled, like the one of old, with the most incongruous evils—with the incertitude of free-thinking, and the intolerance of Popery. For if the professed conscientiousness of Protestants be trust-worthy, then the Protestant Bible contradicts itself, and we might as well have recourse to the papal decrees as to the Word of God. If the Protestant Bible be self-consistent, Protestant conscientiousness is a brittle thread, and religion is just what every man pleases; for though the Bible be the Word of God, every one can make of it what he likes. Till Protestants reform themselves in deeds, as well as words, so far as this matter is concerned, they will never entirely escape from the defeat and the disgrace to which they have been so frequently exposed, in fighting Popery with the weapons of infidelity, and assailing infidelity with the shafts of Popery. We *profess* to refute Popery by Scripture, and infidelity by argument. But the fact is that the conflict with the first actually hinges on the true interpretation of Scripture, and with the latter on the inherent excellence of Scripture. *Our* appeal to the Bible in both cases is invalidated by our so-called conscientious collisions. Consequently, we can oppose the papist only by a *licentious* right of private judgment, and the infidel only by a *purblind* submission to authority.

Our collisions of sentiment not only rend the Church, but

prove the existence of an unfair use of conscience. To deny both of these consequences is to set ourselves against both reason and revelation. As to the latter, if Christian union be not sorely damaged by the Protestant denominational system, the New Testament speaks only in enigmas. And as to the former, we shall as soon believe two contradictory propositions to be both true, as believe two conflicting consciences to be both *honest so far as the matter in dispute is concerned*. It is our hope that a combination of two extravagances like these will prove, from its very enormity, to be more easily overthrown, than a single extravagance by itself.

It will not be difficult now to dispose of the third point, namely, What are those matters on which a *positive* identity of opinion must be demanded as the basis of union? As it is illusory to expect the same attainments, or an equal amount of knowledge, in all men, the rule by which we should be guided can be none other than this; that every member of the Church should believe and profess that amount of Christian Truth, which his opportunities and capacities have enabled him to acquire. If there be, in this way, a certain amount, however small comparatively it may be, of definite explicit truth possessed and avowed by every brother, and, at the same time, the absence of every error that could bring him into collision with the truths embraced by his brethren who are further advanced than himself, we gain the two pre-requisites to intimate and enduring Christian fellowship. We secure, firstly, a real and substantial foundation, limited though it may be, on which to build; and, secondly, we exclude the chance of a disruption or explosion, while the structure is being erected or after it is finished.

These remarks imply that the Church has, and must have, a creed. Is it not a fact that no Church has been found without a creed, in one form or another? Different creeds have, of course, different values; but if we get a good creed, is it not better to have it reduced to writing, than to leave it unrecorded?

It also appears that the creed of the Church is likely to embrace truths which *every* member of the Church has not been able to grasp and appreciate. When a large majority of the Christian community have obtained a clear and vigorous hold of any truth, that truth may legitimately be inserted in the common public creed or symbol. Inasmuch as this truth has become an item in the creed, no member of the Church may be allowed openly to contravene or deny it. If any one does so, his conduct must become a matter of discipline, or may issue in schism. While at the same time it is quite possible that not a few "weak" brethren may be practically involved in the error opposed to this truth, who have not had their attention properly directed to it, nor enjoyed the means of illumination; on whom, therefore, it would be unscriptural, authoritatively and immediately to impose the Church's decision, on pain of excommunication. Take any doctrine or duty of Christianity, and in regard to it there might be found a bold impugner of the truth, who ought to be summarily excluded from fellowship; while in regard to the same point there might be found a "weak brother," in doubt and uncertainty, who surely ought to be allowed time and assistance and opportunity to examine, and judge and approve.

Take, for example, the practice of slave-holding. That

wilful covetous slave-holding is a crime, and ought to exclude an individual from church communion, is now very generally acknowledged, and may be regarded as an article in the creed of Protestant Europe. But it is only within a very recent date, that Christians became conscious of the enormity of this sin. We must, therefore, beware of exercising too stringent a discipline in dealing with it, as well as of a laxity that would involve us in its criminality. On the one hand, it seems to be perfectly legitimate and absolutely necessary to hold no Christian fellowship with those men now-a-days, who can come forward and unblushingly justify and defend the right of man, Christian man, to hold property in his fellow-man. And, on the other hand, it would be altogether unscriptural and suicidal to insist, that no ignorant or benevolent holder of slaves, in a country where slavery is law, can be a Christian, or a member of the church. Such an assertion would unchristianize some of the apostolical churches, and excommunicate the Father of the Faithful himself.

It is as great an outrage upon conscience to conceal the truth which we do know, as to profess the truth which we do not know. The Church, undoubtedly, must enforce discipline upon those who openly gainsay and deny any Scriptural truth whatsoever, else she would be guilty of hiding the light; but she must also exercise forbearance towards the thoughtless and uninstructed, else she would be asking them to go where their conscience does not lead.

The Christian's creed, then, is not a stereotyped symbol, fixed once and for ever; it must be expected to receive additions from time to time, as the Church "increases in knowledge," and goes on unto perfection. As to the man-

ner of constructing her creed the, Church, perhaps, has yet something to learn. It ought to be done in a business-like way; it ought not to be woven with threads borrowed from the web of an effete philosophy, nor hammered on the anvil when red-hot from the fires of controversy. The conclusions which shall be attained and established by calm and prayerful study, and express the principles of a successful ethical science, and of a Christian theology worthy of the name—a theology as scriptural as it is philosophical, and as philosophical as it is scriptural—a theology resting on the two immovable pillars of an unexceptive metaphysics and a complete exegesis, can alone be regarded as the suitable items of a creed, which may challenge and secure the adherence and approbation of a free united Catholic Church.

III.

We come now to the third point involved in the great problem of Christian union, namely, *the limits of external uniformity*. As uniformity in every trifling detail is as impossible as it is undesirable, so, on the other hand, without some degree of outward conformity to a common model, union can never be visible and manifest to the world. What amount of external symmetry, then, is necessary to embody and preserve unbroken and unmarred the spiritual fellowship of believers in Christ?

The first principle on which Christian association is founded may be expressed thus,—that the disciples who live in the same neighbourhood, and have the means, consequently, of becoming personally acquainted with each

other's character, should recognise each other as brethren. Such a recognition, which is not only agreeable to Bible precepts, but also the spontaneous expression of Christian feeling, is quite impossible, in man's present condition, without some sensible or bodily sign. The act of joining together in social worship is not sufficient for this purpose; for the door of the public sanctuary is open to all, and to it the impenitent are specially invited, that they may listen to "the glad tidings of great joy." The proper and peculiar badge of Christian discipleship undeniably consists in sitting down together at the Lord's table, there solemnly and affectionately to "remember Him," and publicly "shew forth His death."

Since it is so plain that there cannot be visible and obvious union at all among Christians in the same locality, without some points of external uniformity, it appears to be just as plain that a conjoint participation in the Lord's Supper is one of the most essential of these points. Hence it follows, that when any professing Christian does not habitually take his place at the common communion table with his neighbouring brethren, whether this arises from a refusal on his part to come, or from a prohibition on their part forbidding him, we have a sure indication of schism, or of something worse. If either of the parties become apostate, professing "another gospel which is not another," *denying* some of the most characteristic and fundamental doctrines of Christianity, the other party will feel constrained, and is bound to separate. This separation will be effected either by withdrawal or exclusion. But *this kind of separation* is not schism, for one of the parties concerned is no longer Christian. Again, if either

of the parties deny some secondary and important truth, which the other holds, they will likely feel necessitated to separate. This separation is schism, because the severed parties are *both* Christian, and the guilt of the schism must lie on the party who is in error. It is of great importance to notice what has been often strangely forgotten, that schism loses all its distinctive meaning, unless the two parties concerned are *both* recognised as *Christian.* Hence, allowing due weight to all that has been written and preached about *want of love* being a cause and distinguishing feature of schism, still the definition of schism, which does not give prominence to contradictory judgments on subsidiary yet weighty matters as an essential element thereof, is defective and inaccurate. It is these contradictory judgments *alone* that perpetuate, even when they do not originate, separate communion tables in the same neighbourhood. To speak of healing schism, then, while leaving these conflicting opinions untouched and unreduced, which is the most approved plan of our modern skill, is like attempting to cure a wounded limb by leaving it alone, and putting the plaster on a sound one.

It would appear, therefore, that whenever there are two communion tables set up near each other, for any other reason than simply to accommodate the growing number of Christians, either one of these tables is apostate and antichristian, or the visible Church of the living God is rent in twain. And if there be no sufficient and just cause for Christians separating from each other in the most affecting and distinguishing act of their worship, we can conceive of none to justify their separation in any of their religious social services whatever. Those parties who

unite intelligently and cordially as Christian brethren, in openly commemorating their Saviour's dying love, are surely bound by every tie, as they should be always prepared, to unite with each other in every other public act of devotion, and in every effort of evangelistic philanthropy. Hence there cannot be a more manifest inconsistency, or a more painful impropriety, than for those who have taken their places side by side at the board covered with the symbols of their Redeemer's broken body and shed blood, declining, under any pretext whatever, to associate together in prayer, or in praise, or in any service whose design is to disciple their fellow-men, whether at home or abroad.

Can any plea be urged to explain or vindicate the inconsistency now hinted at? Two men profess the warmest attachment and most devoted obedience to the Lord Jesus, and the most affectionate confidence in each other, and they both set their seal to this profession by a joint public and reverential participation in a heart-stirring communion service;—can it be imagined that these same two individuals shall be disqualified or indisposed, shortly afterwards, either to bend their knees in concert, imploring a divine blessing on themselves and others, or to engage hand in hand, and heart with heart, in *any* "work of faith or labour of love?" Such disqualification or indisposition may, indeed, spring from unholy passion, or conflicting sentiments, but will not be produced by the mere lapse of time since the solemn communion day, or by removal to a distance from its hallowed scene. Whatever reason may be adduced to palliate or justify the separation of Christians from each other, while they are engaged in examining the

Scriptures, or choosing pastors, or designating missionaries, the same reasons, *if they be scriptural or valid*, will have ten-fold greater force in vindicating the erection of a separate inclosure for the observance of the Lord's Supper.

It has been our design to shew that nothing can justify the institution of two communion boards in the same neighbourhood, except a sufficient increase of numbers. And when there are two eucharistic tables in one neighbourhood for any other reason whatever, either one of them is not Christian, though it may be called so, or the Church is in a state of schism. We have also seen that when there is no reason to have separate communion services, there can be none to separate in any other service of Christianity. Hence our conclusion, that *nothing can fairly warrant Christian brethren who are living near each other, and are not too many to form one congregation, in separating from each other, with the view of instituting or perpetuating different societies or meetings for the service of God in any of its manifold aspects.* Consequently, whenever such different societies or meetings are either originated or continued, the culpability of schism is surely incurred by one or other of the parties. It may very easily happen, as we believe it has happened very frequently, that both of the divided parties are involved in this guilt. If anything but guilt in one of the parties could necessitate a separation, or vindicate the innocence of the other party, when a separation takes place, then visible union is not a duty to be enforced on all Christians. And consequently the accomplishment of union must be regarded as an accident or a miracle; and schism itself is not a sin, but a misfortune.

Let it be once allowed, then, that in every instance in which a party-wall is constructed to sever Christian brethren in carrying out the precepts of their common Master, both sides are not, and cannot be, free from criminality. Is it not abundantly evident that the guilt which can and should effect a severance and prevent them from working or worshipping in company, will be felt, or *ought to* be felt, most keenly and powerfully, when a joint communion service is proposed? Now, our denominational differences either are, or are not, of such a nature in themselves, as to necessitate and justify their respective adherents in totally refraining from all mutual fellowship at the eucharistic table of their common Lord. If these differences are essentially and inherently of such a repellent nature, then some of the recent and delightful and auspicious movements that have taken place, avowedly to promote union, are really of a retrograde character. The warm-hearted brethren, who have left for a short season their respective denominational inclosures to witness for Christ, their one and only Master, over the symbols of His atoning death, have been grievously mistaken. They have not effected a triumph, as they fondly imagined, of evangelical love over party zeal, but rather of weak sensibility over eternal truth. But then, on the other hand, if our denominational peculiarities be not intrinsically of such an import as to reprobate and forbid all inter-denominational or mixed communion services, neither are they such as legitimately to permit or warrant anything like permanently separate societies or distinct organisations at all.

In reply to this argument, many voices are ready to

exclaim: Our denominational churches *do* exist, and it is a most difficult and hazardous, if not an impossible, task to take them all to pieces, with the view of reconstructing the material into a new ecclesiastical framework of supposed greater symmetry. It is amply sufficient for all practical purposes, and for all sober-minded men, to cultivate, so far as circumstances will allow, mutual sympathy and occasional communion and co-operation. An inter-denominational communion observance, now and again, will accomplish the object as well, if not better, than more frequent fellowship. Its very rarity will attract considerable attention, while all are left free to follow each his own judgment in questions of subsidiary importance.

This representation proceeds on the supposition, that there is no breach of union, no guilt of schism, in our present denominational net-work of Christian societies; that even the most distant incorporation of the present various sections of the Church is not to be expected, as being in truth undesirable; that matters in this respect are now as well as they can be, or ought to be. For is it not unchristian, nay absurd, to attempt to justify the neglect of one duty by the performance of another? If our denominational piebald organisations involve no disunion, no fracture in the temple, no wound in the body, no gash in the vine, then it is idle to think of vindicating them. But if their character be really culpable, and their consequences really evil, then to endeavour to extenuate or excuse or defend their continuance, on the ground that their respective members cultivate intercourse with each other, by occasional communion seasons, and by engaging together in this and the other good work, is a sort of

logic that deserves to be fully exposed and severely reprobated.

We can well understand how an intelligent Christian might occupy some such position as the following. Christianity is certainly disfigured by the prevalence of so many sects, whose existence cannot be fully reconciled with the genius of the gospel, or with the commands of Christ, or with the wants of the age, or with the yearnings of the regenerated soul. *But I do not precisely see on whom the guilt incurred lies, or by what practical measures the evil is to be remedied.* Meanwhile, therefore, I can only endeavour to cultivate Christian fellowship with brethren of other denominations, as circumstances permit, and seek for further light on this momentous and difficult question.

But this is *not* the ground which is generally taken by the leading Protestants of the day. It is affirmed, over and over again, that our denominational patch-work in itself is not an illustration of schism, or a number of rents in the unity of the Church; that schism, scripturally understood, is not developed except in the unholy feelings which may arise in consequence of, or in connection with, our ecclesiastical divisions. It is maintained that the Church has no need of further light on the *principles* of Christian union; that every one should be a staunch adherent of his own party, reserving the residue of his love to be divided among all the other parties; that this is, practically at least, the *beau ideal* of Bible unity for the present age; and that if something better be in store for our descendants, something like an universal incorporation, or a Catholic Church, it will be brought about

by a miracle of grace, or, at all events, by some means of which we have not, and indeed cannot now have, the most distant conception.

This opinion is highly conservative, and thus approves itself to many. It has a savour of modesty, to recommend it to others; we *know not* what great things the Lord will yet do for his people! It answers the purpose of an extinguisher, to be placed upon every spark of rash innovation; and is a bridle in the mouth of every one that is given to change, and that would make the allowed imperfections of the Church a pretext for agitating some *sinister* scheme. But, at the same time, this opinion is an effectual barrier to all progress and improvement; so long as it is held by the community, our ecclesiastical condition is a fixture, having its faults and blemishes stereotyped, like hieroglyphics graven in the rock forever. It is, therefore, of the very utmost importance to inquire, whether the above view of the case is indeed the right one. The question is simple, as it is weighty.

Has our denominational system of ecclesiastical paddocks, of fragmentary churches, of sects whose name is "Legion," no faults or blemishes,—no *heavy* faults, no *malignant* blemish? Does it involve no serious error, no pernicious sin? Has it not sprung from, and does it not still nurse, many unchristian feelings?

It is not our immediate design to reason out this point fully. But we may ask the individual, who would answer these questions directly and unequivocally in the negative, is there any *limit* to these denominational divisions and sub-divisions? May the Church of Christ be severed in its outward form till it become a confused heap, appar-

ently at least, of fragments and fractions, and chippings and clippings, and all the while not lose its true unity? Or we might request such a one to explain those texts of Scripture which inculcate Christian concord, and which are in everybody's mouth. Or we might demand a refutation of the principle which we have already endeavoured to establish, namely, that if there be no valid cause to prevent two Christians from recognising each other's discipleship at the communion ordinance, there is none such to keep them separate in any act of worship or any effort of love.

Assuming, then, that the Church of the living God is rent by our denominational sections, that the unity of the faithful is broken by our canonical castes and clans, that "the pillar and ground of the truth" is marred and shaken by our ecclesiastical cracks and splinters, to attempt to buttress a rotten falling system, or to extenuate the errors and guilt involved in supporting such a system, on any plea whatever, is any thing but genuine wisdom or single-eyed Christianity.

An examination of the pleas that have been used will fully expose their futility. Is it said, we know not what to do? This plea is of no force to vindicate what is bad, or to uphold what is unscriptural; it should be used to stimulate to true humiliation, earnest prayer, and diligent inquiry. When man is in an extremity and at his wit's end, to sit down in the listless contentment of despondency is characteristic of the spell-bound apathy of the unbeliever; it savours not of the freedom and power of the Gospel. If the crew of a vessel be threatened with shipwreck, to abandon all thought and action, and resign themselves to an

ignoble and sluggish patience, betrays the cowardly temper of fatalism. They who know the heaven-bestowed energy within them, and who trust in an over-ruling Providence, will cease to act, and cease to hope, only with their latest dying breath. If our denominational organisations be unscriptural and schismatical, they are destined to perish, and will be, ere long, shipwrecked among the breakers a-head of us. Knowing this, to pretend that nothing can be done, because we have not, immediately, a clear perception of what should be attempted, is unmanly folly and unchristian sullenness. Such a sentiment comes not from a heart that appreciates and trusts the promise of our Lord, "To him that believeth all things are possible."

Another plea is this, that whatever disadvantages or imperfections may exist in our present divided state, they are, or might be, counterbalanced and obviated by the absence of all schismatical feeling, and by occasional co-operation and intercommunion. We could scarcely have believed it possible, that thoughtful Christian men would have used such an argument as this, unless we had heard it, and read it, times without number. Is this not identically the old and oft-exploded fallacy of Naaman, the Syrian, (2 Kings v. 18), on which so many Christian homilies have been penned and preached? The world knows, if the Church does not, that the performance of some duties cannot varnish or whitewash the stain incurred by the neglect of other duties.

There is, besides, a peculiar aggravation in the worthlessness of the plea as used in the present instance. When the fact of inter-denominational communion in the ordinance of the Supper, more or less frequent, is urged in

extenuation of our sectarian fabrics, and as a sufficient evidence of our Christian union, the inconsistency is no less painful than palpable. There is something like infatuation manifested, when men can plead in their defence the very circumstance which most emphatically condemns them. Will a brother venture to exculpate or palliate his habitual acts of injustice and unkindness towards his own mother's son, under the pretence that he *is* his brother, and that he loves him? Just so is it with the Christian, who would justify his denominational palisades which keep him at an habitual distance from his ransomed and renewed brother, by the allegation that now and again he embraces him as a brother over the memorials of Emmanuel's sufferings. Is it not the very fact that they are brethren,—companions once in the same woeful ruin, sharers in the same wondrous mercy, emancipated at the same nameless price, sanctified by the same Divine Spirit, expectants of the same glory—all of which endearing intimacy is symbolized and sealed and published, by taking their places together at the table of their Lord;—is it not all this that renders our denominational fences and inclosures so unintelligible, so unseemly, such a scandal to our religion, such a stumbling-block to the infidel, such an impediment to evangelistic work, such a restraint upon prayer, such a grief to the Spirit of all grace? Is it conceivable, then, that a stinted acknowledgment and partial obedience to these very considerations which shew the odiousness and guilt and pernicious tendency of our sectarianism, should be brought forward, so frequently and confidently, to gloss it over, and prop it up?

There is yet a more startling infatuation in the plea.

For who wishes *all* these denominational fences to be preserved? Every one, in wishing his own perpetuated, wishes those of his neighbour to be burned. There is a vast majority of Christians opposed to each one of our denominational peculiarities, taken by itself. To vote for the continuance of them all in the slump, therefore, is nothing but a disingenuous collusion. We would take the very extremity of our evil as an omen for good. The folly of our age is surely near its culminating point, and a time of repentance near; for can Christians desire to perpetuate an ecclesiastical system, every separate item of which is so clearly and emphatically condemned by an overwhelming majority of the community? Will their ablest leaders continue to plead in support of that system no better argument than this: We admit it to be a partial, and uphold it because it is not a complete, barrier, to the expression of brotherly love?

IV.

Hitherto our remarks have been made chiefly in reference to the case of *one* congregation or assembly of Christians. And we have endeavoured to shew how division or schism may be prevented from arising among its members, by practical attention to the following principles. 1. The really conscientious exercise of the right of private judgment, being the only way in which men can attain an intelligent conviction of the truth, will never lead them to conflicting conclusions. 2. There are matters of probability, expressed in propositions which cannot be affirmed confidently to be either true or erroneous, on which diversity of opinion, as distinguished from contradiction, may

legitimately and innocuously arise. 3. When a contradiction occurs on any matter of truth and error, or right and wrong, a schism, more or less manifest, is inevitable, the guilt of which rests on those who are in error, because they are in error through a lack of conscientiousness. 4. No member of the Church should be required to profess more truth than what he clearly comprehends, and yet he must be free from such decided and erroneous judgments as contradict the truths held by his better informed brethren. 5. When a congregation is formed on the above principles, a joint visible participation in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper is the proper public mark of unity, and is the pledge of the most unrestricted social fellowship in every act of worship, and in every effort of benevolence.

Supposing, now, that a considerable number of such Christian congregations are formed, the question remains, What relations do they sustain to each other, so as to secure their visible union without encroaching on each other's liberties and rights? The problem is before us, How far churches can be each independent or equal, and at the same time all of them associated together? The following principle will afford considerable facility in attempting to solve this question; namely, whatever relation an individual Christian bears to his brethren in the same congregation, a similar relation precisely will a single congregation bear to the other congregations near it.

Hence if there is to be a visible union of congregations, as well as a visible union of individual Christians, there must be an association of congregational office-bearers corresponding to the association of individual believers in the

primary congregation. In this case it must be an association of office-bearers, or representatives, because of the impossibility of *all* the members of the churches meeting together. If this primary representative assembly, as well as any others which it may be found desirable to institute, be constructed and conducted on the principles which have been already set forth, we shall have the same security for visible union and internal harmony, combined with individual freedom of thought and action, in the constituents of such an assembly, as we have seen is guaranteed by these principles in each represented congregation.

As the size of a primary congregation is determined solely by the circumstances of its locality, in like manner should the size of a representative assembly be settled by the circumstances of the country in which the represented churches are scattered. And as, according to the principles which have been enunciated, the authority of a majority of the congregation, or of its office-bearers, will rightfully extend, or be felt to be needed, *only* in matters of probability, involving affairs of taste, propriety, economy, convenience, and the like, such also will be the limits of the authority of *a majority* of the representative assembly. For on all other and more important topics, unanimity, or at least the absence of contradiction and opposition, is presupposed. When the exercise of authority is supported by the consentaneous judgment of all the members of the church or churches, it can occasion no difficulty. Moreover, it is only *some* matters of probability, or those which plainly concern the business of the congregation, as a congregation, or the business of the

representative assembly, as such, on which the authority of a majority of the one or the other should be exercised.

It has been said, "no church has a right to interfere with the internal concerns of another church." There is no more, and just as *much* truth in this statement as in the following one: no individual Christian has a right to interfere with the private concerns of another Christian. To whatever extent each of us should be his brother's keeper, to the same extent should each congregation be the guardian of a neighbouring congregation. We heartily respond to the sentiment, that "the spiritual affinity of sister churches is such that, unless forcibly prevented, they cannot choose but seek each other's welfare, honour, peace, and prosperity." If there be danger to liberty from the representative assembly overstepping its limits, there are also dangers from the want of a visible and recognised union of churches, such as, "that of silent alienation—allowing grounds of dissatisfaction to remain unexplained—taking no pains to clear up alleged matters of complaint, but secretly indulging a grudge, or a dislike, manifested only by a cessation of intercourse. This evil may be found in both parties, and then, as the unbrotherly feeling is reciprocal, there will be neither the offer of kind offices on the one hand, nor the rejection of them on the other, but a state of cold unapproachable aversion." This is just as plain as that, though a congregation's authority is liable to be abused, the exercise of such authority is absolutely necessary to its existence and prosperity as a church. This inference, then, cannot be gainsaid, "that whatever evil committed by a member of a church would warrant his exclusion from its fellowship, a similar evil,

committed by a church or churches, would equally involve the forfeiture of the right to it, or them, to the confidence and fellowship of other churches."

We here append, in the form of a note, an extract from Guizot's History of Civilization, translated by Hazlitt. Bogue, London, 1846, vol. ii. p. 20-23. The sentiments are remarkably well expressed, and strikingly confirm the preceding views :—"A common conviction, that is to say, an identical idea acknowledged and received as true, is the fundamental basis, the secret tie of human society. One may stop at the most confined and the most simple association, or elevate oneself to the most complicated and extensive; we may examine what passes between three or four barbarians united for a hunting expedition, or in the midst of an assembly convoked to treat of the affairs of a great nation; everywhere, and under all circumstances, it is in the adhesion of individuals to the same thought, that the fact of association essentially consists: so long as they do not comprehend one another, they are mere isolated beings, placed by the side of one another, but not holding together. A similar sentiment and doctrine, whatever may be its nature and object, is the first condition of the social state; it is in the midst of truth only, or in what they take for truth, that men become united, and that society takes birth. And in this sense, a modern philosopher (M. l'Abbé de Lamennais) was right in saying, that there is no society except between intellects; that society only subsists upon points and within limits, where the union of intellects is accomplished; that where intellects have nothing in common, there is no society; in other words, that intellectual society is the only society, the necessary element, and, as it were, the foundation of all external and visible associations.

"Now, the essential element of truth, and precisely what is, in fact, the social tie, *par excellence*, is unity. Truth is one, therefore, the men who have acknowledged and accepted it are united; a union which has in it nothing accidental or arbitrary, for truth neither depends upon the accidents of things, nor upon the uncertainties of men; nothing transitory, for truth is eternal; nothing confined, for

truth is complete and infinite. As of truth, then, unity will be the essential characteristic of the society which shall have truth alone for its object; that is to say, of the purely religious society. There are not, there cannot be, two spiritual societies; it is, from its nature, sole and universal.

"But unity of truth in itself is not sufficient for the rise and subsistence of the religious society; it is necessary that it should be evident to minds, and that it should rally them. Union of minds, that is to say, spiritual society, is the consequence of the unity of truth; but so long as this union is not accomplished, the principle wants its consequence, spiritual society does not exist. Now, upon what condition do minds unite themselves in truth? Upon this condition, that they acknowledge and accept its empire; whoever obeys truth without knowing it, from ignorance and not from light, or whoever, having knowledge of the truth, refuses to obey it, is not part of the spiritual society; none form a part of it if they do not see nor wish it; it excludes, on one side, ignorance, and on the other constraint; it exacts from all its members an intimate and personal adhesion of intellect and liberty.

"Many centuries were necessary to bring out the true nature of spiritual society, its complete nature, and the harmony of its elements. It was long the general error to believe that the empire of truth—that is, of universal reason—could be established without the free exercise of individual reason, without respect to its right. Thus they misunderstood spiritual society, even in announcing it; they exposed it to the risk of being but a lying illusion. The employment of force does far more than stain it, it kills it, in order that its unity may be not only pure but real, it is necessary that it shine forth in the midst of the development of all intellects and all liberties.

"It will be the honour of our times to have penetrated into the essence of spiritual society much further than the world has ever yet done, to have much more completely known and asserted it. We now know that it has two conditions: 1st, the presence of a general and absolute truth, a rule of doctrines and human action; 2d, the full development of all intellects, in face of this truth, and the free adhesion of souls to its power. Let not one of these conditions ever

allow us to forget the other; let not the idea of the liberty of minds weaken in us that of the unity of spiritual society: because individual convictions should be clear and free, let us not be tempted to believe that there is no universal truth which has a right to command; in respecting the reason of each, do not lose sight of the one and sovereign reason. The history of human society has hitherto passed alternately from one to the other of these dispositions. At certain epochs men have been peculiarly struck with the nature and rights of this universal and absolute truth, the legitimate master to whose reign they aspired: they flattered themselves that at last they had encountered and possessed it, and in their foolish confidence they accorded to it the absolute power which soon and inevitably engendered tyranny. After having long submitted to and respected it, man recognised it; he saw the name and rights of truth usurped by ignorant or perverse force; then he was more irritated with the idols than occupied with God himself; the unity of divine reason, if I may be permitted to use the expression, was no longer the object of his habitual contemplation; he above all thought upon the right of human reason in the relations of men, and often finished by forgetting, that if it is free, the will (reason?) is not arbitrary; that if there is a right of inquiry for individual reason, it is still subordinate to that general reason which serves for the measure and touchstone of all minds. And even as in the first instance there was tyranny, so in the second there was anarchy; that is to say, the absence of general and powerful belief, the absence of principles in the soul, and of union in society. One may hope that our time is called to avoid each of these sand-banks; for it is, if I may so speak, in possession of the chart which points them both out. The development of civilization must be accomplished hereafter, under the simultaneous influence of a twofold reverence; universal reason will be sought as the supreme law, the final aim; individual reason will be free, and invoked to develop itself as the best means of attaining the universal reason. And if spiritual society be never complete and pure—the imperfection of humanity will not allow it—at least its unity will no longer run the risk of being factitious and fraudulent."

Imperfect though humanity may be, if there be truth in the word of God, or efficacy in Emmanuel's blood, or power in the Spirit of all grace, spiritual society, even on earth, may become so complete and pure, that the members of the Christian Church shall be one, substantially and visibly, one in their views of truth and duty, and consequently one in *all* their works of faith and labours of love, so that the world shall be constrained to admire their harmony, and be persuaded to adore and serve their Lord.

PART II.

A VINDICATION.

There were three acquaintances who had often talked casually about one of the topics of the day. Having resolved to hold a more formal debate, they united in requesting a common friend to sit as arbiter. In the following report of the proceedings the different parties have received names, by which the reader will be able to see what are their general opinions and mental tendencies. The name of MELANCTHON, who was born in 1495, is used as the representative of Evangelical Protestants in the present age. LORD HERBERT was born in 1581, and his name serves as an index to the arguments of scepticism. The objections and appeals urged on behalf of the Papal Church are preceded by the name of BELLARMINE, who received a cardinal's hat in 1599. THEOPHILUS, as a lover of God, endeavours to discriminate between the true and the false while the discussion proceeds.

DIALOGUE I.

CONCORD AND CONSCIENTIOUSNESS.

I.—*Conflicting Convictions and Liberty of Conscience.*

Melancthon.—"Before one body of Christians can be justly charged with being schismatical in relation to another, it must be shewn that they have been guilty of *a breach of charity*, which, it should never be forgotten, *is schism.* But a breach of charity cannot consist in Christians peaceably declining to adopt the opinions of men fallible as themselves, against their solemn convictions—the result of devout examination of the word of God, and of any evidence of its meaning that is within their reach."[1]

Lord Herbert.—Have the goodness, then, to inform me, if the unbeliever in Christianity is culpable of a breach of any law, human or divine, in "peaceably declining to adopt the opinions of men fallible as himself, against his solemn convictions?"

Melancthon.—The unbeliever rejects the truth, on the reception of which the union of the Church is based. "The true unity of the Church reigns through the

[1] Schism, as opposed to the Unity of the Church. London: 1839. A Prize Essay, by Rev. Prof. Hoppus, p. 309.

medium of the TRUTH, received by faith."[1] "In the first churches, *the truth* was one and the same to all believers."[2] "Both love and holiness flowed from *obeying the truth.*"[3] "Truth was the animating principle of love; but error proved to love as the touch of a torpedo."[4]

Lord Herbert.—Let me ask you this question: Does a man's "*solemn convictions*" ever mislead him? If you say no; then the opinion or judgment of a "*fallible*" man, which is based upon such a conviction, is in fact infallible; and the supposition that the solemn convictions of one man may be directly hostile to those of another man, cannot by any possibility be realised. Again, if you admit that a man's solemn convictions may sometimes be erroneous, then the truth on which the unity of the Church is built is a mere quicksand, unless you can distinguish between the solemn convictions which are treacherous and those which are not, or unless you attain that truth in some other way than by the use of your intelligence. Tell me, now, may the solemn convictions of one man be directly opposed to those of another man?

Melancthon.—Of course they may. "Episcopacy has her list of sufferers for conscience sake, as well as nonconformity. The candid Dissenter must acknowledge that a man may be a 'Churchman,' without being a 'Vicar of Bray;' and that multitudes have given the strongest evidence of their sincerity, by preferring 'loss' to change of profession. And there are those who peaceably hold the contrary sentiments, with equal evidence of

[1] Schism, p. 185. [2] Ib. p. 188. [3] Ib. p. 189. [4] Ib. p. 190.

honest purpose; who, without wishing to interfere with the religious freedom of *other* Christians, calmly and solemnly declare their *own* belief, that national religious establishments are a corruption of the Church,"[1] and so forth.

Lord Herbert.—You admit, I suppose, that these contradictory judgments cannot both be true. You confess, then, that a man may take what is erroneous to be true, at the very time that he is "giving the strongest evidence of sincerity," and "of honest purpose," and "while calmly and solemnly declaring his belief." What confidence, then, can such a man have that he has found the truth on any question? For aught that you can allege either to convince yourself or me to the contrary, your solemn conviction, as to the truth on which the unity of the Church rests, may be delusive. Why, therefore, should you not be contented "calmly and solemnly to declare your own belief," "without wishing to interfere with the religious freedom of other" men, such as ourselves?

Melancthon.—We have no wish to interfere with the religious freedom of any man. "Who is the true *sectarian*, but he who denounces all as sectaries, who are not of *his* sect? Who is the '*fanatic*,' if not he who sees fanaticism everywhere but in his own party spirit? Who is the '*enthusiast*,' but the man who makes a god of externals and non-essentials, while he finds '*enthusiasm*' in those only who are in earnest respecting the grand objects of religion? Where is the '*schismatic*,' if not among those who term everything schism which does not accord with their own opinions, who are ready to reproach as 'pha-

[1] Schism, p. 340.

risees,' or 'hypocrites,' those whose conscientious scruples they know not how to appreciate?"[1]

Lord Herbert. — To be "in earnest respecting the grand objects of religion," is the most fruitless and harassing toil, if "pious and *sincere* men may hold schismatical opinions, and pursue a conduct which tends to foster schism,"[2] that is, if a man may *conscientiously adopt* schismatical or erroneous sentiments; and if the basis of Christian union be, that when Christian contradicts Christian on matters of so much moment as to cause a separation, they "shall do justice to each other, as to the feelings and motives with which they maintain their respective peculiarities,"[3] by admitting as "much high *integrity of purpose*"[4] on the one side as on the other. Having thus conceded that your sincerity and conscientiousness may deceive you, you have no means left of attaining a certain knowledge of the truth; and having thus eliminated from conscientiousness—not a pretended, but a genuine conscientiousness—everything like authority and rectitude, you are the very party who "know not how to appreciate" another man's "conscientious scruples;" and you have no resource left but the miserable subterfuge of "denouncing all as sectaries who are not of your sect," and "terming everything schism," or heresy, or unbelief, "which does not accord with your own opinion."

Bellarmine.—It is notorious that Protestant is continually contradicting and opposing Protestant, not only on the important points which lead to the institution of different denominations, but on other weighty matters also. When in justification of their heresy in leaving the

[1] Schism, p. 341. [2] Ib. p. 445. [3] Ib. p. 146. [4] Ib. p. 447.

true Church, they plead the right of private judgment, this plea manifests its worthless infidel character in the way just pointed out.

Melancthon.—We, as Christians, do not claim conscience entirely to ourselves; we allow it both to the unbeliever and the Romanist. In "Romish ceremonies and errors," "conscience, however erroneous, is concerned," and these ceremonies and errors, therefore, "taken as a whole, are matter of remonstrance, rather than of contempt."[1]

Bellarmine.—When two Protestants come to conflicting opinions, the conscience of one of them is, of course, erroneous. The infidel has, I suppose you admit, a conscience too, and it is erroneous. Our conscience,—you do not deny its existence, but it is erroneous. Then, pray, how am I to know, or how do you know, the difference between an erroneous and a truthful conscience? Your conscience is erroneous, and yet *you think* it truthful. My conscience is erroneous, and yet *I think it* truthful. Our friend's conscience here is erroneous, and yet *he thinks* it truthful. Verily, this right of private judgment, as you have now explained it, is like a deceitful morass, and the Bible, when intrusted to it, becomes "a nose of wax," "a shoe that will fit any foot." My friend, it is full time you came back to the bosom of the infallible Church.

Theophilus.—That would be to exchange one evil for a worse. How do you know, without the exercise of reason and conscience, that your Church is infallible? Conscience and reason, if fairly and legitimately consulted, never deceive men. Possession of the *truth* is a *test* of *sincerity:*

[1] Schism, p. 336.

sincerity is the means, and *the only means*, of attaining *truth*. In professing any truth, it is implied that he who denies it is insincere; in this sense, that he has not examined the matter in hand with due candour and diligence. As it is utterly impossible for the Christian and the infidel, as well as for the Protestant and the Romanist, to admit that each other is equally and thoroughly sincere in adopting their respective and conflicting tenets, so is it completely unreasonable and suicidal for Protestant schismatics to talk of each other, as if in taking opposite sides on important questions, they were both equally honest and honourable, either in the sight of man or of God.

Melancthon.—"Is not liberty of conscience a fundamental?"[1]

Lord Herbert.—Truly it is. But why do you claim it so loudly and frequently for yourselves,—that is, liberty to contradict each other; and so sternly refuse it to us, to contradict you all?

Melancthon.—We yield to you the same liberty of conscience which we demand for ourselves, namely, that no man be exposed to punishment or loss on account of his opinions, whatever they may be.

Lord Herbert.—Loss of goods or pain in the flesh were nought, compared with the charge of guilt which you prefer against me on the ground of my rejection of Christianity. Now, I do not deny that when a man *is proved* to be a criminal, it is perfectly right to speak of him as such; but what I wish to know is this: How can you speak of infidel and Romanist errors as culpable, and of

[1] Schism, p. 379.

Protestant errors as innocent? If "liberty of conscience" can excuse the error of setting one Scripture against another, why may it not excuse my alleged error in setting reason against Scripture?

Melancthon.—"There are only two cases in which the right of private judgment, as to religious opinions, can be superseded. One is, when there is either an express revelation from God as to the point in question, or a precedent so evidently intended (all circumstances taken into the account) to have the force of divine law, that it becomes virtually a revelation. The other case is, when God has delegated authority to *man* to decide. In the former, there is no room for private judgment, because the will of God, when known, is final." [1]

Lord Herbert.—Yes; but you maintain, if I mistake not, that two men may *innocently* contradict each other as to *what* God says, and other two *cannot* innocently contradict each other as to *when* God speaks. Admitting that "the will of God, when known, is final," how are we to know that it is known? Allowing that "an express revelation from God" can settle any question, what is to be done when I claim liberty of conscience to deny the Bible to be "an express revelation from God," and when you and your neighbour claim liberty of conscience in extracting conflicting commands from what you both call an "express revelation?"

Melancthon.—Protestant Christians do not always, and never should, draw contradictory precepts from the Word of God. "If individuals (and there have been many), eminent for piety, learning, and talents—whose motives

[1] Schism, pp. 101, 102.

appear to have been as pure as can actuate man, and who have shown the greatest anxiety to discover truth—have, nevertheless, formed different conclusions respecting church government, does not this very circumstance, even in itself, amount to a considerable presumption that, account for it as we may, the Scriptures are less explicit on this point, than on those respecting which these men have been agreed?" [1]

Lord Herbert.—Instead of answering my question, or removing the difficulty which I have pointed out, you only plunge yourself by these remarks into deeper perplexity. You infer from the fact that the most honourable men have "formed different conclusions" on a certain point, that, therefore, the "Scriptures are less explicit" on it than on the other points on which these same men are agreed. In the first place, this inference is not allowed by the men themselves to whom reference is made. There have been many most eminent and respected doctors in the Christian Church, who have maintained that the Bible speaks as explicitly and distinctly, though not so copiously, on the matter of church government, as on that of salvation. In the second place, admitting that there is "a considerable presumption," when respectable men contradict each other, that the truth on the contradicted point is really not known, still this presumption is nought against a dogmatic assertion on their part, that on that point the truth *is* known. Their assertion must be examined and refuted, to show that the truth is *not* known, unless you take refuge in the sceptical stronghold, that the *very existence* of conflicting sentiments *proves* truth to be un-

[1] Schism, p. 57.

attainable. Your presumption, then, is worthless, unless, on the one hand, you make common cause with us; or, on the other hand, undertake to evince, in every instance, that when good and learned men do contradict each other, the controverted point is not clearly or surely known to either party. To choose the second side of the alternative, and undertake such a task, is surely not to be preferred to the short and safe run from every difficulty which we have discovered, by asking, What is truth?

Melancthon.—"When any matter that may be in question, relating to religious practice, is regarded by any individual concerned, as a direct affair of conscience, to conscience alone must be the appeal. For (as an example of my meaning, I may refer to the power sometimes claimed for civil rulers) though a power absolutely discretionary, to decree the conditions of visible unity in the Christian Church, be not contended for, it is evident the proviso that nothing is to be commanded which is repugnant to the Word of God, is of little avail, unless each individual, who is to be bound by the decisions of the magistrate, is himself allowed to form his own judgment—whether, or not, these decisions are in harmony with the divine record. Everything short of this amounts to an infringement of that private judgment and conviction which are necessary to entire moral accountableness. Without this liberty, all that remains is blind submission to an infallibility like that claimed by the Church of Rome." [1]

Lord Herbert.—The principle you have now laid down will land you in the scheme of a thousand petty infallible

[1] Schism, p. 174.

churches, or send you afloat on the ocean of scepticism. Your assumption is this, "when any matter that may be in question, relating to religious practice, *is regarded by any individual concerned*, as a direct affair of conscience, *to conscience alone* must be the appeal." You and your neighbour contradict each other on the doctrine of election. It is a matter of religion; it is regarded by each as a direct affair of conscience; to conscience alone the appeal lies; no power, absolutely or partially discretionary, can step in and settle the dispute. To admit such a power, would be to recognise the great principle of Popery. But do you not see, that in pleading for this unlimited liberty, you are at one with us. You and I contradict one another as to the claims of the Bible;—it is a matter of religion; it is regarded as a direct affair of conscience by you and me; to conscience alone, therefore, the appeal is made; no power, absolutely or partially discretionary, can interpose to arbitrate between us. You hold your opinion, and I hold mine; and there the matter ends, and must for ever end, on the principles which you have now stated. And it really comes to the same thing at last, whether we say, every man's conscience is right, or every man's conscience is wrong; whether we affirm that every opinion is true, or every opinion is false; or that there is no such thing as truth or error, right or wrong;—whether you borrow the logic of Pope Hildebrand, and constitute every wayward conscience a little infallible church, or, abstracting a shaft from *our* quiver, leave, as some of your friends would say, truth bleeding and dying of the wound you have inflicted.

Bellarmine.—There is, too obviously, no permanent

resting-place between infidelity and infallibility. This Protestant claim of liberty of conscience, with its complement, that there is no authority on earth to judge and decide among the endless so-called conscientious squabbles and scruples and conflicts of its supporters, does most surely prove that there is no foundation for truth and religion in human society, but the infallibility of the Holy Catholic Church. Men may oscillate between the doubts of atheism and the uncertainties of private judgment; they may hurry to and fro between the swamp of scepticism and the quicksands of Protestant confusion; but since they cannot find an enduring dwelling-place in the one or in the other, they will ultimately, from pure necessity, return one and all to the one true unerring Church, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.

Theophilus.—There is, undoubtedly, no proper or secure halting place between the abyss of unbelief and the ground of a firm and unwavering assurance of infallible truth. Truth, though infallible in itself, is nought to us, unless we can obtain a most certain, or, if you choose to call it, an infallible, grasp and hold of it. Now, this *subjective* infallibility, or clear and unembarrassed certainty, cannot be conveyed directly to any person by a purely *objective* Church or Bible, even though infallible in itself. I must *know* that the Church or the Bible is infallible before *I can trust either as such;* and therefore, *if my knowledge be not infallible,* the infallibility of the one or the other is nothing to me. The one party denies the infallibility, or certainty, or truth, of my knowledge, by asserting that the Church alone is infallible, and denying to me the right of private judgment. The other party denudes my sub-

jective knowledge of certainty, if they affirm that there is no certainty but in the objective Bible, and if they maintain that contradicting interpretations of the Bible are, or may be, equally conscientious. Both the Papist and the Protestant boast that they have each an infrangible lever, by which they can elevate human society; but in rejecting the validity of the human understanding, they reject the only fulcrum on which any such lever can work.

The will of God cannot be known to an intelligent person in any other way, except by the exercise of his private judgment. In order to know the will of God, therefore, our understanding must be trust-worthy; and there cannot be, in the very nature of the case, more trust-worthiness in any manifestation of the will of the Most High, whether that manifestation be claimed for an unerring volume, or for an impeccable corporation, than there is in our own understanding. Our understanding or reason, however, can be certainly trusted only when it is *legitimately* used. To seek the truth, therefore, on any given point, *honestly and diligently*, is to save ourselves from self-deception, as well as from the deceptions of other men on that point. Hence it appears that whenever two individuals search for truth on any controverted question *diligently and honestly*, they will not, and cannot, come into direct and hostile collision on that question. For there *is a Power* "to decree the conditions of visible unity in the Christian Church," or, in other words, the conditions of harmony among free intelligent beings. The power of Truth, or its unity, makes these conditions possible and practicable. The almighty power of the God of Truth has rendered these conditions binding upon man to fulfil

them at his peril. And *the power of perceiving and appreciating Truth,* conferred upon the human mind by our Creator, and aided by the Spirit of Truth, whose grace is the purchase of Emmanuel's blood, leaves every bold errorist and wilful schismatic without the vestige of an excuse.

Truth is ever in harmony with itself. Hence those beings who have the faculty of knowing truth and rejecting error will, if they use this faculty aright, always be in harmony with each other. It is the most extravagant unbelief to doubt that there is a power on earth which discriminates, and can discriminate infallibly, between error and truth, and between right and wrong,—even the power of the human mind, when it is simply and strenuously following after what is true. It is only on this supposition that we can account for the alienation and rupture which invariably occur between men who find themselves opposing one another on some momentous topic. In such cases, it is an indisputable fact, that one or other of the two parties (if it be not so with both) has not, with all care and conscientiousness investigated and weighed the topic before them. And there is, besides, a deep and indestructible consciousness of this fact in the minds of both parties, which alone gives life to discussion, and meaning to opposition.

It is a common *ruse* of scepticism to insinuate that the existence of contradictory opinions on any point proves that the truth on that point cannot be known, at least with much certainty. The constant occurrence of collision of sentiment in human society is a loud warning to exercise the utmost caution in judging and determining contro-

verted matters. This is the proper and wholesome influence which the painful fact referred to should have upon the mind. Its more common effect is to seduce men to indifference and thoughtlessness, and then drive them to rash and bigoted decisions. But the right of private judgment becomes a bane, and not a privilege, unless we suppose that it never misleads us in its proper and sober exercise, when equally removed both from intellectual licentiousness and from mental sloth. This right implies, not only that there is truth, but also that truth is to be certainly, yea, infallibly found, and that error may be as certainly and indubitably avoided. It would be rash to affirm, that intellectual harmony and concord of man with man on any question proves that error has been eschewed and truth embraced. But if union be not a *positive,* it is, at any rate, a *negative* test, of the presence of truth in the community. Though the existence of catholic unanimity on any matter in a society of sinful men cannot warrant the conclusion, that it is in the truth that they are thus harmoniously united, the absence of catholic unanimity, on a question of some moment, manifests most incontestably the presence of error. No man has a *right* to do what he pleases, or to think as he chooses, unless he pleases to do, and chooses to think, *what is right.*

II.—*Toleration and Persecution.*

Melancthon.—"The very term *toleration* is a mark of power existing, like the emblem of the Roman dominion at Jerusalem, 'in the holy place, where it *ought not;*' for

what mortal can have a right to determine in what manner men may worship God, so long as their religious practices do not interfere with social order and morals?"[1]

Lord Herbert.—You are now using, in your own cause, the very fallacy which you formerly exposed in one of your opponents. Stillingfleet contended for the power of the magistrate to legislate in the Church, "on the presumption that the Protestant magistrate would command 'nothing repugnant to the word of God.'"[2] To which you replied. that this proviso "is of little avail, unless each individual who is to be bound by the decisions of the magistrate is himself allowed to form his own judgment, whether or not these decisions are in harmony with the divine record."[3] Now, your own proviso about the magistrate's power, that he has authority to prohibit men's religious practices, when they "interfere with social order and morals," is fatal to your doctrine of religious liberty, "unless each individual who is to be bound by the decisions of the magistrate is himself allowed to form his own judgment, whether or not these decisions are in harmony "with social order and morals."

Melancthon.—It were absurd to exclude human authority from the kingdoms of this world, but it ought to be excluded from the Church of Christ. "In proportion as human institutions are identified with Christianity, human authority is put on a level with the commands of God; the unity of Christians is treated as dependent on the will of man; the professed Church spurns from her society some of the most conscientious servants of Christ; the immortal axiom, that "THE BIBLE, and THE BIBLE ALONE, is the

[1] Schism, p. 182. [2] Ib. p. 177. [3] Ib. p. 174.

religion of Protestants," is infringed ; the right of private judgment, the fundamental principle of the Reformation, is relinquished ; and the main pillar of Romanism, man's dominion over conscience, is retained, as a prop to the Protestant Church." [1]

Bellarmine.—Is human authority to be excluded, *entirely and unconditionally,* from ecclesiastical affairs?

Melancthon.—There should be " as little of mere human legislation as possible in the Church." [2]

Lord Herbert.—This is no answer at all ; but it is quite as good as a more definite answer would have been, when judged by your own principles. Supposing that you had said specifically, this or that human authority is admissible on this and the other question—as that deacons may decide such and such matters, and presbyters all other matters—where would " liberty of conscience" be, " unless each individual who is to be bound by the decisions is himself allowed to form his own judgment, whether or not these decisions are in harmony" with the principle laid down? Protestant liberty of conscience is thus, in fact, the very same as what you call infidel liberty of conscience ; inasmuch as, according to it, no answer is as good as any. It is thus impossible to distinguish between one thing and another, as between human and divine authority, which are thus " put on a level ;" for, indeed, in this way, you give us your best assistance in reducing every thing to the same *dead* level.

Bellarmine.—You said, that by the admission of human authority, " the professed Church spurns from her society some of the most conscientious servants of Christ." Now,

[1] Schism, pp. 183, 184. [2] Ib. p. 183.

when two sects or denominations are formed, we shall suppose, according to your own statements, that there are "most conscientious servants of Christ" in both of them. Hence, by the formation or continuance of these two sects, each of which is "a professed Church," the charge which you bring against others recoils upon yourselves. For it is plain that in this case, "the professed Church," that is, each Protestant denomination, "spurns from her society some of the most conscientious servants of Christ." If each sect does not *spurn* those of another sect, it puts them out, and bars the door against them, else there would be no occasion for more than one sect. It thus appears that it is not only the sects which introduce the civil magistrate's power into the Church of God, that are leaning on "the main pillar of Romanism," but also any party who, shutting themselves up in some cramped inclosure, shall call themselves *the* Church, or *a portion of the* Church, while yet they admit that they exclude Christians as conscientious as themselves. Is it not an attempt to exercise "dominion over conscience," when you say to your neighbour, your conscience is as good as mine, and your opinion is formed as conscientiously as mine,—nevertheless so long as you hold a certain opinion, I shall do everything that lies in my power to debar you from the privileges of church fellowship? In this way you have most obviously availed yourselves of the principle, which you falsely impute to us, *man's* dominion over conscience, to prop up the crazy scaffolding of your Protestant denominations.

Theophilus.—If "the Bible, and the Bible alone, be the religion of Protestants;" and if "the right of private judgment be the fundamental principle of the Reformation,"

then nothing can be more dangerous to the Reformation, or more dishonouring to the Bible, than to force one of these into conflict with the other. If two men, in the *legitimate or conscientious* employment of their private judgment, may inevitably come to espouse opposing doctrines, the one asserting that *this* passage of Holy Writ teaches precisely the reverse of what, the other asserts, is taught by *that* passage, or both extracting from the very same passage antagonistic tenets or contrary commands, does it need words to prove that this result is, substantially, altogether equivalent to setting conscience against the Bible, or the Bible against itself? But a house divided against itself cannot stand. It thus appears that Protestant Christians must, by a more cautious and devout exercise of the right of private judgment, disencumber themselves of their conflicting convictions, and, as the consequence of this, abandon their denominational distinctions, if they would realize anything like a reasonable or scriptural union, or wield, *as one body*, an effective weapon against either infidelity or Popery. The present condition of the Protestant Church thus appears to be most anomalous and precarious; for while all denominations resort in self-defence to a sceptical liberty of conscience which sets truth at defiance, each sect institutes for itself narrow and unscriptural and intolerant terms of communion. Some truths are treated as errors, (which is scepticism), out of deference to a pretended conscientiousness; and some errors are treated as truths, (which is the essence of Popery), to support sectarian fabrics. The outworks and organizations of the Protestant commonwealth are thus resting on a grotesque conglomerate of popish and infidel principles.

As to the extent of human authority in the Church of Christ, we shall slip into the most disastrous confusion, unless we always discriminate between matters of certainty and matters of probability—between cases which do involve, and cases which do not involve, directly, truth and duty—between affairs of principle and affairs of expediency. In dealing with *matters of expediency*, we must do so *on principle*. Every action involves, as we think, contrary to the common doctrine about *indifferent* actions, a question of duty. Hence we have said "cases which do involve, and cases which do not involve, *directly*, truth and duty." For example, fixing the sphere of a foreign missionary, or determining his salary, or, we are bold to add, introducing instrumental music into churches—are, in themselves, and *within certain limits*, questions of probability—of expediency, in which truth and duty are not *immediately* implicated. Still these questions ought to be discussed and settled under the control of high and holy principles. But as these principles themselves are not then under discussion, only the extent of their application, and the balancing of one with another in practical details, there is, no doubt, legitimate room for variety of opinion, without coming to conflicting judgments. Within certain limits, we have said; for it is easy to turn any question of expediency into one of principle. In fixing the sphere of a missionary, or determining his salary, it is just possible to do a most criminal deed. It is also easy to assume a position with respect to the use of music in divine worship most erroneous and schismatical. The views which we are advocating demand from the Church, in a normal condition, or when its members are prepared to act up to their

profession, unanimity of judgment in matters of *principle*, and in affairs of *expediency*, submission on the part of a small number to the prevailing sentiments of their brethren. Hence it appears that nothing so much undermines and weakens the authority of the Church as schism. For it is nothing else but resistance to her lawful authority by persons within her own precincts. When the Church's proper and rightful authority is disputed and disowned by some of her own members, how can it be expected that those who are without will hold it in respect and honour?

Whenever a case occurs in which duty or doctrine or sacred principle is involved, the power of the Church in such a case lies, and can lie nowhere else, but in her unanimity on the question. If her testimony to the truth be harmonious and unbroken, it will be unassailable as a rock, and potent as fire. But if there be discord in the camp, even though it do not proceed to an open rupture and permanent division, the truth will be thereby veiled or distorted, and, consequently, the proper influence of the Church, which is the influence of truth, will be proportionally lost.

Again, when a case of mere expediency arises, in which probabilities, not principles, are immediately concerned, if the minor part yield to the majority, in the event of disagreement, so that all petty details and outside arrangements are amicably settled, the Christian society presents an unmarred and uninterrupted front to the world; which thus learns to admire and fear the men, whose quickened and well-regulated conscience leads them on questions of truth to a real and indistructible unanimity, and on questions of expediency or probability to a self-denying and

reasonable forbearance. But if a portion of the Christian society become wilful and insubordinate, and turning a petty question into one of principle, refuse to submit, a division will arise. Thus the due authority of the Church will be disputed and resisted, by persons who were bound to proclaim and uphold it. Consequently, it will be seriously damaged, if not entirely overthrown.

Schism, then, whether it spring from the recklessness of a discontented party, refusing the legitimate authority of the major portion of the brethren on a matter of expediency, or whether it be the result of opposite and antagonistic judgments on a point of principle—in either case is a dangerous rock on which the authority of the Church is sure to suffer shipwreck. This authority is, like some other good things in the world, not only valuable or powerful, but also delicate; whose very influence depends upon the entire preservation of their exactitude and refinement. The lancet with the finest edge is the best instrument; but the finer the edge, the more easily is it turned. If the beautiful and perfect mirror of a reflecting telescope be stained or cracked, as it may so readily be, it is thereby rendered useless. The chronometer, on whose precision to a second or two the safety of a vessel, with all its cargo of merchandize and souls, does sometimes depend, has to be watched with special care, and shielded from every trifling disturbance.

If the Christian Church were what she ought to be, and what she might be—what God commands and Christ expects her to be—and what she will yet become—her authority would be sharp and terrible as a burnished glittering sword, because her character would be a worthy

reflection of her Saviour and her Lord, and because all her movements and operations would be in harmony with each other, and in accordance with the laws of Heaven. Now, the full efficiency of the Church's power clearly depends upon this accordance being maintained undisturbed, and this harmony unlost, and the reflected image of her Lord unmarred; while all of them are constantly exposed to frequent and serious injuries.

The authority of the Christian Church, and the integrity of Christian union, are identical. And as nothing is more powerful on earth than the one, neither is anything more delicate than the other. When the Church's unity is impaired, her authority is shaken; when her unity is broken, her authority is overthrown. The maintenance of Christian union—that is, the fact of many men, with all the infirmities of humanity, and all the temptations of this world, coming to be, and continuing to be, "of one mind and one accord,"—may seem like the nourishing of a lovely exotic in an uncongenial clime. And so it is. It is the very work, however, which our Father has given us to do. Perish the thought that He has sent us a warfare at our own charges!

Alas! that evangelical Christendom should have failed so greatly hitherto in doing this work. Even in regard to those truths in which *we are all really agreed*, this agreement, in consequence of our schisms, is not visible and patent to the world. Men have too much ground, if not to deny, certainly to call in question that agreement. These great and shining truths are not indeed deprived of their own inherent brightness; but they are not supported in the face of the unbeliever, and carried home to his conscience, by the Church's authority. The want of this

authority does certainly leave him some shadow of an excuse. Then as to the points on which Protestants are at variance and discord—and some of them are weighty enough—the world has only to set Christian against Christian, and then stand by smiling at the tragic sport, and presently thereafter pursue its godless path unchecked and unreproved. Who has not, moreover, mourned over the relaxation of Christian discipline in our various churches? Even if the sects were *striving to be* as rigid and uncompromising in enforcing the great principles of morality and religion as they are in maintaining their own peculiarities, the multiplicity and consequent unavoidable jealousy of rival societies, would defeat their best intentions, and reduce us, as at present, to a condition of extreme laxity. The slackened rein of church discipline, and the remissness of the grasp with which it is held, are not less clearly a marked feature of Protestantism, than they are a sure indication of shattered and enervated authority.

Melancthon.—It is purely ridiculous for "erring man to assume the air of infallibility."

Lord Herbert.—But who is the party that assumes this air, if it be not those who call their fellow-men, on account of their unbelief, graceless and wicked. Free-thinking is the only consistent scheme of non-infallibility.

Bellarmine.—If so, it must be *thorough* free-thinking, to which every opinion is alike. For if you believe anything whatever, even a negative—if you deny and refuse our claim to infallibility—you cannot do so without assuming, not merely the air, but some of the pith and marrow of infallibility.

Theophilus.—Clearly so. But there is an important dif-

ference between maintaining that *all* the opinions of *any* individual or any body of men *are* right, and that *every* man *is capable* of forming a right opinion. No one man is infallible; because every man is responsible, and may abuse his responsibility. But the human intelligence of any man, *if rightly used*, is infallible; else the man is not even responsible.

Melancthon.—Well, I never meant to deny this; but seeing that men, even Christians, are constantly abusing their responsibility, nothing else can be done but to live at peace with each other, and abstain from all mutual persecution.

Lord Herbert.—If you really think, as your language seems to imply, that Christian union may be realised, even while Christians are abusing their responsibility, why may not we get to your heaven on the same principle, even admitting that we are abusing our responsibility while remaining in unbelief?

Bellarmine.—But what do you mean by persecution?

Melancthon.—"When exclusiveness and *imposition* are found in alliance with *authority*, the result is seldom confined merely to the denial of spiritual privileges; but is developed in THE ATTEMPT TO TYRANNISE OVER CONSCIENCE, BY PENALLY ENFORCING CREEDS, FORMULARIES, AND VARIOUS ECCLESIASTICAL LAWS."[1]

Lord Herbert.—You assert a distinction between the denial of spritual privileges and tyranny over conscience by penal enforcements, allowing the exercise of the one, and forbidding the other. But your distinction "is of little avail, unless each individual who is to be bound by the decisions, is himself allowed to form his own judgment,

[1] Schism, p. 367.

whether or not these decisions" carry a bare denial of spiritual privileges or a penal enforcement. "Everything short of this amounts to an infringement of that private judgment, and conviction, which are necessary to entire moral accountableness." What *you* call a "denial of spiritual privileges," the sufferer may consider "a penal enforcement." *So long as he thinks so*, are you not tyrannising over his conscience?

Melancthon.—"What scenes has not the Church of Christ presented when groaning under the yoke of man? What deeds have not been perpetrated in the name of religion—in the name of the benevolent Saviour? What furious and blood-stained schisms have raged among the professed peace-makers of the earth in the anti-Christian strife for power? Let all the wars and persecutions that have been carried on under the alleged sanction of injured, libelled Christianity, recount the dreadful tale! Let the fire and the flood tell it—the dungeon and the scaffold—the rack and the wheel—the sword and the gibbet! Let the rocks and the caves—the forests and the mountain-snows repeat it—more hospitable to the outcast wanderer than the heart of man calling himself Christian. Let the burning stake declare it—where Catholic and Protestant have mingled their ashes together for denying the supremacy of a fallible man over mind and conscience."[1]

Lord Herbert.—"The man who would deprive me of my substance, or of my personal liberty, as the punishment of my religious peculiarities, is not more certainly a persecutor than is the person who, for the same reason, has endeavoured to lower my reputation, or to inflict an un-

[1] Schism, pp. 368, 369.

necessary wound upon my feelings." "The man who wounds the spirit of another unnecessarily, is a persecutor, as surely as the individual who would maim his person; and the mind which can employ itself to blight the just reputation of a religious opponent, is precisely that mind which, in another age, would not have hesitated to load him with chains, or to burn his flesh."[1]

Bellarmine.—If you deprive a man of "spiritual privileges," do you not "injure his reputation," and "wound his feelings" too? The distinction, then, between spiritual privileges and civil rights in relation to the present question is nothing but a Protestant fallacy. And to deny that error—no error—is to be punished in any form whatever, is the wildest licentiousness of unbelief. And if error may be punished, then the worst error should be punished most severely. Hence it is the highest wisdom of true mercy to visit all heresy and damnable error, whereby the souls of men are endangered and lost, with torture and death. If you abandon this position you have no resting place, but in the Protestant and sceptical doctrine of liberty of conscience, which, after it has divided the Church into a thousand contending sects, leaves the last and least of these sects, as well as all the rest, exposed every moment to "contentious tempers" under "the pretext of CHRISTIAN LIBERTY." "The lawless schismatic," to use your own words, "has 'a right,' he says, 'to express his mind.' He is dissatisfied; and in his vocabulary, '*Christian liberty*' is but a euphemism for the insubordination of a democrat, who fancies that he is entitled

[1] The Christian Warfare. By Robert Vaughan, D.D. London: Religious Tract Society. 1838. Pp. 140, 144.

to embroil a whole fraternity."[1] This person, whom you call "a lawless schismatic," is the cleverest Protestant among his brethren, and shows he has learned and understood his own creed, better than some of his teachers.

Melancthon.—We protest against intolerance and persecution in every form, but especially against spiritual despotism. And "it is by no means uncommon for schism to manifest itself in A CONDEMNATORY, PRESUMPTUOUS, ANATHEMATIZING SPIRIT."[2] "He who is influenced by the unsubstantial dream of exclusive 'divine right,' or by the more tangible and earthly vision of human supremacy in the Church, hesitates not to ascend the throne of Christ —to grasp the thunders which are reserved for the last judgment; and having laid his brother under an interdict while living, to threaten him with an awful doom hereafter."[3] "Is not *he*, then, the true schismatic, who, trampling on the liberty wherewith Christ has made his people free, would consign to 'uncovenanted mercies,' or even to 'eternal wrath,' those who differ from himself, on points which the Scriptures have not made a constituent part of religion; but which *he* presumes to declare essential?"[4]

Lord Herbert.—It is a fact that Christians do anathematize us unbelievers. You all re-echo the statements of your Bible; "He that believeth not is condemned already;" "if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema." Now, if you have good reasons for anathematizing us, may you not also have good reasons for anathematizing each other? Your brother Christian of another

[1] Schism, pp. 418, 419.
[2] Ib. p. 342.
[3] Schism, p. 349.
[4] Ib. p. 354.

denomination claims an "*exclusive divine right*" against you; for if he did not, there would be no place for two denominations; and you tell him that he is "influenced by an unsubstantial dream." I do not see how this claim on his part, and your counter-claim, can be reconciled with your theory about liberty of conscience, unless this liberty mean license to every man to condemn his neighbour as a rebel, and, at the same time, to love him as a friend. And if this reconciliation could be effected on any intelligible principle, on the same principle it could be shewn, that we are justified in calling the Christian claim of an exclusive divine right against us, an unsubstantial dream. Your fellow-believer consigns you to "uncovenanted mercies;" and you protest that he is "trampling on the liberty wherewith Christ has made his people free." But he replies, I am acting according to conscience. We charge you, therefore, with *trampling on the liberty wherewith God has made his creatures free*, in "consigning us to eternal wrath," because we "differ from you on points which God has not made a constituent part of religion; but which *you* presume to declare essential."

Bellarmine.—It thus appears that the doctrine of Protestants about liberty of conscience, as commonly held, and consistently explained, deprives them of all power to pronounce or declare an anathema against any individual, however wicked or heretical he may be. Thus there is no foundation whatever left for religion in any form, and the first principles of allegiance to the Most High are set aside at the call of a spurious conscientiousness. If there be any religion at all, there must also be an "exclusive divine right" somewhere, and if there be, there must also be

found in some party authority to enforce or maintain that right which they truly possess. And when this *exclusive divine right* is vindicated and defended against those who oppose it, nothing else could be expected but that these opponents should complain of the *presumption* that dares to *trample on their liberty.*

Melancthon.—If I do not answer your arguments, I can tell you what is the cure of schism, and of persecution also. "The CULTIVATION OF THE SPIRIT OF BROTHERLY LOVE, as a vital principle of Christianity in the heart, will tend to destroy schism in its original source. For though schism is the 'pestilence and blasting,' the 'mildew' and the 'locust' of the *Church*—every Christian must look well to the healing of the mischief as the 'plague of his own heart.' Charity, alive and vigorous in many minds, would prove a diffusive principle of life and health to the Church. For every one whose heart is the abode of love, and whose conversation is peaceable and brotherly, is in himself a perpetual rebuke to schism, and a living witness for unity, among all with whom he associates. Even where any may err in the matter of charity itself, let charity still be the interpreter of their conduct. Let due allowance be made for varieties of mental character, of natural disposition, of acquired knowledge—above all, of education and training, of association and habit. Some good men may act towards other Christians more *exclusively* than they would desire to do, in consequence of the trammels of the system to which they may be pledged—trammels which they do not see how they can break through, unless they depart from what appears to them to be the path of duty Others may, with a high-toned conscientiousness, have

unequivocally sacrificed self-interest to conviction. Let us not be ready to judge the *former*, if, in consequence of their not possessing our liberty of action, they cannot go *all* our lengths in free Christian association; and let us not make the *latter* offenders for a word, if they should occasionally allow a strong expression to escape them, with regard to what they deem abuses in religion. The more fully conscious we are of the rectitude of our own course, the more candidly may we afford to listen to the reasonings of those who differ from us. And before we cast a stone at them, let us be quite sure that in forming our own religious connexion we ourselves have been guided by a regard to the will of God, as deliberate, pains-taking, self-denying, and conscientious, as they may have evinced." [1]

Lord Herbert.—This reasoning proceeds on the assumption that "*charity*" can, and always does, discriminate between heresy and orthodoxy, and between right and wrong, in the thousand questions that have agitated, do still agitate, and will yet agitate the Christian Church. If charity be thus unerring, and next to omniscient, your exhortation is pointed and satisfactory. But if charity have no such power, and no such pretensions, how can it prevent a schism among Christians when they contradict each other on a point of what is called faith or duty, except on the principle that it should prevent a schism between them and us, who are brother-men, when we and they are mutually opposed? To admit that Christians "may err in the matter of charity itself,"—that is, we shall charitably suppose, after they have done all that in them lies to guard against error, and then constitute this same

[1] Schism, p. 463-465.

erring charity "the interpreter of their conduct," and to offer this prescription as the cure of schism, is to trifle with yourselves and your subject too. To suppose that there are "some good men," who are prevented from acting out Christianity as they desire, by the "trammels of a system" which they cannot break through, except by departing from the path of duty, is surely a discovery; for I never could have imagined that, in a good man, duty would be found clashing with duty. "The more candidly we listen to the reasonings of those who differ from us," and "the more fully conscious we are of the rectitude of our own course," the more fully conscious shall we be of the error of those who contradict and oppose our course; as you Christians are constantly telling us unbelievers. And if it be an evil, as we have often seen and experienced, that stones are cast at their opponents by men who have not been guided in forming their religious opinions, by a "deliberate, pains-taking, self-denying, and conscientious" "regard to the will of God;" it is an evil tenfold more disastrous to suppose, as you seem to do, that two men may be equally guided by a "deliberate, pains-taking, self-denying, and conscientious" "regard to the will of God," and yet be led to form respectively separate "religious connexions," which are so far antagonistic as to require distinct organisations. If a deliberate, pains-taking, self-denying, and conscientious regard to the will of God, cannot unite those who cherish and practise such regard on all matters of practical importance, *truth* is a vanishing vapour, or conscientiousness is a cruel delusion.

Bellarmine.—Charity is good, only when it is well directed. *Misguided* charity is the source of endless confu-

sion, and becomes a perversion of truth and righteousness. And since the charity of Protestantism has confessedly no guide, as has been just now so clearly pointed out, man can only escape from intellectual and moral anarchy, by submitting to the direction of the Apostolical See. It is ridiculous enough to talk of the infallibility of the Bible, and then subject that Book to the uncontrolled private judgment of every individual; it is still more ludicrous to introduce charity as the umpire in every dispute, when there is confessedly nothing but charity, to meet the aberrations of charity. Our Church is consistent with herself; she adopts a system of "education and training, of association and habit," fitted to bring into one mould all "mental character, natural disposition, and acquired knowledge." Those minds that will not bend, must, in charity to others, be broken. Our ecclesiastical decrees are the embodiment of "the will of God," and to talk of a deliberate, pains-taking, self-denying, and conscientious opposition to them, is pure absurdity and open rebellion.

Theophilus.—It is impossible to draw anything like a clear line of distinction between intolerance and persecution; for persecution is the natural development of intolerance. There is no doubt a valid difference between civil rights and spiritual privileges, but this difference will not help us to define persecution. The most cruel and criminal persecution may be perpetrated, without descending to the vulgar atrocities of robbery and murder. This distinction, however, between spiritual and civil claims, together with every other distinction, as well as every attempt to define intolerance or persecution, or anything else, is utterly futile and preposterous, unless the human

understanding has the faculty of discriminating accurately and infallibly between truth and error, and unless each individual who is responsible, can legitimately attain, by diligent integrity, a full and veracious assurance that he has found the truth in particular instances.

Persecution is intolerance full blown, and intolerance is persecution in the bud; and it is impracticable, perhaps, to say where the one begins and where the other ends. But without a definition which shall accurately specify both, it is vain to reason about liberty of conscience and Christian union. To understand their nature, we must refer to a principle which is deeply involved in every moral and religious question, namely—a penalty is attached, in the providence of God, to every error, theoretical or practical, which is embraced by a responsible being. Nay, more, in many instances there is a penalty attached to error, which is, and ought to be, inflicted on the errorist *by his fellow-men*, under these conditions, that the penalty be in kind suitable to the error, and that it be not excessive in degree. For instance, a thief suffers a penalty at the hand of a magistrate; a liar is sometimes exempt from official control and award, but in the loss of confidence he suffers punishment at the hands of his fellow-citizens; a man of whims and fancies becomes a laughing-stock; a rude man does not escape his recompense, for he becomes a bore; a heresiarch is expelled from the fellowship of the Church; and in every society he who disregards its laws endures the consequence of his transgression. To wink at error or vice,—to fail to visit them with an appropriate penalty,—is to connive at them, and become inimical to virtue and truth.

It is not accurate, therefore, to affirm that persecution consists in inflicting civil pains and penalties on account of a religious or conscientious conviction. A man may hold an opinion which *he regards* as religious and conscientious, which yet ought to subject him to civil disabilities and even to positive punishment. For example, while a nation is carrying on a most righteous war, some of the people might refuse to contribute to its expenses, under the plea of religion and conscience. In such a case the law should take its course upon the recusants; and it is unquestionably just that he who declines to pay his share of taxation should be punished.

Intolerance or persecution, then, consists in inflicting upon an errorist a penalty unsuitable in kind, or excessive in degree, or in treating one who holds truth as if he were in error. It will be said, this statement leaves the matter altogether indeterminate and loose. On the principles commonly received it may be so, but not on the principles which we are endeavouring to establish. On commonly received principles, every statement is utterly vague and worthless. For if liberty of conscience mean liberty to every man to think as he likes, and if the plea of conscience be always held legitimate, then every proposition is equally true and stable, or equally untrue and unstable. If there be a *limit* to liberty of conscience—a point which Protestantism has too frequently left undetermined, what can that limit be but *truth?* To affirm that truth forms the boundary of our right of private judgment, is equivalent to saying, that he who deliberately and honestly adopts his conclusions will not err. On the supposition that we are speaking to those who can distinguish one thing from

another, and who will not err in making their distinctions if they will be sufficiently careful, there is nothing vague or unsettled in our statement, that truth should never be treated as if it were error; and while every error is visited with a penalty, that penalty should never be inordinate in measure nor inappropriate in its nature.

Hence in every instance he who holds the truth really possesses an "exclusive divine right" against those who deny that truth, or who embrace its opposing error. Nor may a Christian shrink from taking up, in the spirit and temper of Christ, the anathema of the Bible against every one who loves not the Lord Jesus. Every one who proclaims the gospel faithfully, consigns to "eternal wrath" the impenitent and unbelieving; and on such an awfully momentous question an error on *either* side is equally fatal to truth and to charity. If you profess to state the marks by which the sheep are distinguished from the goats, and if you err in your statement, the error is disastrous, whether the result of it be to place some of the goats among the sheep, or some of the sheep among the goats. In both cases truth is equally injured; while in the former case love is prostituted to the unworthy, and in the latter case it is withheld from the worthy.

For this endless talk about charity, whether within or without the pale of the Christian Church, whether in high-wrought paragraphs from the press, or in the swelling oratory of the platform and the pulpit, is far wide of the mark, so long as the declaimer does not carry along with him, or as he goes does not faithfully apply, the principle which distinguishes between the affection, complacency, and love which the godly, the virtuous, the

truthful feel towards each other, and the commiseration, pity, and charity which these feel for the ungodly, the vicious, the erring. Hence it appears, that the only foundation on which the Christian Church can be built, in harmony at once with truth and charity, is this, that when Christ's professed followers are *really* guided by "a regard to the will of God, deliberate, pains-taking, self-denying, and conscientious," there will be manifested as the result *only one* "religious connexion."

If, now, it be true, that "schism has been THE GRAND SOURCE OF MISCHIEF IN THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL,"[1] and if this be pre-eminently and palpably true in regard to the Protestant Church, is it not high time for every right-hearted follower of the Lamb to re-examine the principles of his own denomination, resolutely and penitently determined that he will neither overlook nor spare ought that is justly a stumbling-block in a brother's way? Let us remember that "the *tendency* of the opinions and practices of some, is more schismatical than their dispositions; and that we are as responsible to God for the former as for the latter."[2] How, then, can a *conscientious* Christian enjoy peace of mind, till he has done his utmost to discover and renounce and condemn those "opinions and practices" in his own sect whose "tendency is schismatical?" Some one may ask, but are you sure that there are any opinions and practices characteristic of *my* denomination with a sectarian bent and influence?

Let it be assumed that a Christian whose conscience is really honest on a particular topic, and consequently has attained on that topic true knowledge, or, at all events,

[1] Schism, p. 427. [2] Ib. p. 437.

freedom from error, must feel it to be his duty, and rightly so, to separate himself from a society whose terms of communion oppose his upright and true conviction, and that such separation is not schism on his part. But, then, is it not most obvious that if separation on the part of such an individual be not schism, the guilt of schism is incurred by those who impose terms of communion which compel such an one to separate? The question, therefore, which every denominationalist has to ask himself is this, Are there no opinions or practices, *virtually* or *formally* imposed as terms of communion in my own sect, which are not scriptural, and which therefore may compel a man with sincere and enlightened conscience to separate from us, or continue separate? Till a denomination can answer this question in the negative, it cannot fairly plead "not guilty" to the charge of schism,—of intolerance,—of persecution,—yea, of spiritual despotism.

III.—*Charity.*

Melancthon.—Well, then, seeing that there are serious difficulties in strictly defining persecution, and in all stringently logical arguments on this and similar questions, and since your definition is only one among many others, let us take broad practical rules for our guidance.

Theophilus.—It is for broad practical rules that we are in search. Would you call that a broad or a good practical rule, which has an inconsistency on its fore-front? But let us hear your practical canon.

Melancthon.—"Schismatical contention, whether iden-

tified with persecution or not, *prevents the growth* of that very *unity* which is its avowed aim;—for it is strange that unity is often the chief burthen of the strife of schism! Agreement in opinion, however, is in all cases much more likely to take place in connection with mutual candour and toleration, than where this agreement is made a prerequisite to all visible unity. Hence it is remarked by Robert Hall, when speaking of the means of promoting the reception of the truth, that 'it is of the greatest moment to present it in a manner the least likely to produce the collision of party; for the prejudices of party are always reciprocal, and in no instance is that great law of motion more applicable, that reaction is always equal to action, and contrary thereto.' The truth of this remark has been but too abundantly exemplified in the history of religious controversies. For while *schism* itself would seem to have been proposed as the *cure* of 'schism,' (as though the doctrine of homœopathy were to be applied to morals as well as medicine), the remedy has proved worse than the original disease; and the result has been a lasting alienation of Christians from each other. A more than Jewish wall of partition appears sometimes to have existed between them. For inveterate as were the prejudices of the Jew, his exclusiveness gave way to the spirit of the gospel. The Jew forgot his nature, and hailed the Gentile as a brother. But the party-walls which Christians have erected between each other, have hitherto defied the force of charity to break them down." [1]

Lord Herbert.—In these remarks there is more than one inconsequential argument, and there is a statement

[1] Schism, pp. 427, 428.

not consistent with facts. The latter consists in saying that "unity is the avowed aim of schism," and that "schism has been proposed as the cure of schism." That does not seem to us to be a true account of the matter as it is found among Christians. *Truth* has generally been the chief acknowledged aim of the schismatic, and unity only as dependent upon truth. Truth being the avowed aim of schism, amid an endless multitude of schismatics such as Christendom presents, truth is clearly imperilled, if not absolutely lost. If *you* maintain that *unity at any price* is the proper aim of man, you are, whether you know it or not, a convert to our creed. "Agreement in opinion," you say, "is in all cases much more likely to take place in connection with mutual candour and toleration, than where this agreement is made a prerequisite to all visible unity." If it be so "*in all cases*," as you affirm, why did you protest and leave the fellowship of the Church of Rome, and why do you exclude us from your fellowship? If *visible unity* comes first in the nature of things, and *agreement in opinion* follows in its wake, the boasted reformation of the sixteenth century was a grand mistake, and the modern crusade against Deism and Romanism should face about without delay. *We* are the true apostles of unity; for we would make *everything*, especially those whims which are called religious doctrines, subordinate to its attainment and consolidation.

We are not surprised that charity has not force enough to break down the party walls of Christendom. We *are* surprised that you should expect it to do so. These party walls, if we can believe those who have built them, are constructed with stones of truth, and cemented with the

mortar of conscience. The charity that would overturn *such* walls must have a savour of the infernal regions. If you are prepared to assert, that charity ought, and can, and will break down these walls, the case is worse with Christians than even their enemies supposed. For, in the first place, if charity have such power—if it is her proper office to sweep away these rueful partitions—we are unwilling to estimate the awful amount of guilt now resting upon the Christian Church for perpetuating them so long. And, in the second place, to maintain that charity alone is competent to effect this work, will imply that the walls to be destroyed are *not really* built of the materials specified, and consequently the plea of truth and conscience in the Christian community has been very often nothing else than the bold-faced cry of hypocrisy.

Bellarmine.—If charity can *heal* schism, it ought to have prevented the original Protestant schism. Holy Mother Church allows the utmost possible latitude of opinion to the faithful within her bosom. She would tolerate everything to preserve *visible unity*, except contumacious heresy. *This* she cannot tolerate, just because it destroys visible unity. Such is her policy, just because *visible unity promotes agreement in opinion.* The reaction of parties that does not disturb the visible unity is wholesome; otherwise it is pestilential and deadly. Too true it is, that "schismatical contention prevents the growth of unity;" we shall unfeignedly rejoice, if Protestant schismatics have, by their bitter experience, at length begun to learn this painful lesson, and are thinking of a recantation of their errors, while suffering under a conviction of their guilt.

Melancthon.—In the remarks which fell from me, reference was intended to Evangelical Christians, and to them alone. We appeal to other principles in refuting the claims of those who reject or corrupt the gospel. "If, to use the language of the Saviour himself, the 'eye be single'—if the conscience be thoroughly enlightened, and the heart sound—the 'whole body will be full of light,' and the Christian will be secure from serious error." [1]

Lord Herbert.—The course which you pursue is one of which we have good reason deeply to complain. We desire to meet you on *common* ground. This you refuse; and have one set of principles for yourselves, and another set for us, and a third set, I suppose, for our friend here. Now this see-saw between exoteric and esoteric principles, in the nineteenth century, and in the disciples of the New Testament, is absolutely intolerable. But let us look at the latest edition of your own ultimatum,—"the Christian is secure from serious error." The Christian is described as one whose "eye is single," and "whose whole body is full of light;" and of such an one it is affirmed that "he is secure from serious error." The Church, you say, consists of such, or ought to consist of such; and this you assume in every argument. The assumption, as you state it, seems to be perfectly worthless. If we had some unfailing means of determining what is serious error, then when we found any one free from it, we should infer, on your principle, that his eye was single. Or again, if we could inspect any man's heart, and observe present in it the single eye, we might then believe that such an one was free from serious error. But so long as the latter is

[1] Schism, p. 62.

impossible, and the former impracticable, your principle is at best an empty truism. Only this much is evident as the sun, that so long as Christians *seriously* contradict each other, *one party* is *not* free from serious error, and consequently, on your own hypothesis, is destitute of the single eye.

Bellarmine.—There is no ambiguity about our principles. The identity of the one holy Catholic Church cannot be mistaken. He who believes what the Church believes cannot be wrong. *The Christian is, indeed, free from serious error.* The charity expected from one Christian to another cannot be extended to the heretic who is involved in serious and damnable error. So far the Protestant is right.

Lord Herbert.—I congratulate him on the company which he keeps.

Melancthon.—It is, nevertheless, true that genuine Christians do recognise each other when they become acquainted with each other's character. Charity must be the unfailing remedy of schism; since schism is nothing but the breach of charity. What, for instance, can be a greater outrage upon charity than to regard schism as hereditary? "In modern ecclesiastical phraseology, those are often called 'schismatics,' who have never actually divided from any Church or denomination, but who have remained attached, from mature conviction, to that form and order to which they have been accustomed from their earliest years. Schism is thus considered as a kind of *original sin.* It is supposed to taint the posterity of those who first incurred the charge of being guilty of it. It flows in the veins of their successive

descendants from age to age; and they are regarded in the light of a race of men among whom there constantly exists an infectious disorder, and who ought to be put under a perpetual quarantine."[1]

Bellarmine.—If schism be nothing more than the ebulition of an uncharitable temper (an opinion which will be fully exposed hereafter), your reasoning is good enough in itself, provided it would quadrate with undoubted facts. It is certainly irrelevant, unless you maintain that there is no such thing, as a Church or denomination, whose very constitution is schismatical in the principles of its construction, as you affirm of the Church of England, as well as of the holy Catholic Church itself. Consequently, although a man may be brought up in a Church schismatically constituted, if he in his riper age adhere to such an ecclesiastical constitution, is he not clearly guilty of schism? If we thoughtlessly embrace a hereditary error or heresy, are we not, therefore, culpable?

Lord Herbert.—But our friend does not suppose the case of an individual *thoughtlessly* adhering to the Church of his fathers, but that of one who has done so "from mature conviction." This qualification of the statement seems to me only to make the reasoning more preposterous. For what do we find, when we look at the matter in hand in all its aspects? We see a goodly number of distinct Christian organisations, whose constitutional principles are mutually and sharply antagonistic on several very important topics. To question this averment, and insist that denominations differ only on trifles, is to pass upon them a sentence of severest reprobation. Now this

[1] Schism, p. 245.

decided and signal opposition, manifested by the diverse ecclesiastical societies towards each other, proves that many of them, if not all of them, are "*in serious error.*" How then can we take any one individual's dictum as true, when he proposes to enlighten us by saying, "the Christian will be secure from serious error."

Again, we are told that Christian men support these conflicting denominations "from mature conviction." If human beings may be found pursuing, *from mature conviction*, a *course of serious error*, your argument is nothing better than a moveable platform, leading you into our boat, of whose sea-worthiness you have no high opinion. But if human beings who act from mature conviction will be preserved from serious error, then, not only your argument, but the entire organisation of the Protestant Churches, calls for revision and thorough reformation.

Theophilus.—In noticing your more recent remarks, my friends, it seems impossible to deny that *visible unity* among intelligent beings must invariably be based upon a certain amount of agreement *in opinion.* To determine what those opinions are in the agreement of which the Church of Christ is founded, is the question that awaits us in our next discussion.

Charity has immense influence both in human society generally, and in the Christian community. But what power can she exert over two men, who have adopted conflicting judgments on a significant and critical question, except to soften their manners, and lead them to the throne of grace, to seek, in the joint perception of the truth, a termination of the conflict? How can bare charity other-

wise interfere to heal that conflict, or unsting it, without herself coming into conflict with truth? If once truth give place to charity, we are indeed committed to the principle that visible unity promotes agreement in opinion, —a principle which in the hands of infidelity eviscerates *truth* of all its force and beauty, and which in the hands of the Romish Church rifles conscience of all her integrity and independence.

The phrase, *a Christian is secure from serious error*, is too vague and unguarded to be of effective use in controversy. It is a clumsy and objectionable mode of statement, implying, however, the need of something similar, but more definite and correct. An adequate and precise principle of this sort will be found, we apprehend, in the position which we have been led to adopt. When any man comes to a conclusion on a particular topic from a *really mature* conviction, his conclusion on that topic will be free from error. By taking such a position, we proceed to erect the fabric of human knowledge and religion on a double foundation, which is accessible to all men. We thus assume the immutability of truth, and the validity of the human understanding when it is honestly and diligently employed in the search of truth.

From this principle it follows, that when two Christians contradict each other on a *serious* matter, one of them at least is certainly in a serious error. And if he re-examine this serious error with "a single eye," he will assuredly be led to perceive what it really is, and to abandon it.

That many of the "serious errors" in which professing Christians are entangled, are hereditary, will be questioned by none. That these errors involve us in trans-

gression, and form an element of original sin, seems to be self-evident. But, if it be true that man cannot embrace or support any *serious* error from *mature* conviction, then is there opened up to us a plain and practicable road-way, by travelling on which the Christian Church may, with the blessing of her Divine head, escape from the confused chaos of conflicting sentiment in which she has been so long befouled and weakened. Let it be once conceded that a mature conviction of the genuine sort on any question is compatible with serious error on the very same question, and not only will the schisms of the Protestant community be hopelessly perpetuated, but also the heresies of Popery will be the same as if they were indeed infallible doctrines, and the sophisms and fallacies of free-thinking will attain an amount of vigour far exceeding the expectation of their abettors. If a man cannot without culpability and danger reject the Bible and become a disciple of secularism; if another man cannot without culpability and peril corrupt the glorious gospel, and yield himself a victim to Romish superstitions; so neither can a third man without blame and hazard espouse an error which rends the body of Christ, and become a supporter of Protestant schism. If a ripe and honestly attained conviction may be only a grievous mistake, we have indeed a shield under which the Protestant denominationalist can find sufficient shelter; but then it is a shield broad enough to protect also, and almost as efficiently, the unbelieving or superstitious errorist, even the most extreme. How can we successfully expose the faults of others, while palliating our own under the very plea which we pretend to assail? That there are several grave and significant

errors in judgment, which are pervading the Christian community, and which form the actual buttresses of our party-walls, and prolong the alienation of our hearts, none, we think, will deny. We say to the infidel and the Romanist, a diligent and conscientious search for truth will deliver *you* from *your* errors. Will it not do as much for ourselves? Let us take home the retort with humility and shame to our inmost thoughts. The schisms of Protestant Christians are founded on errors. The prevalence of these errors prevents the realisation of union. The delay of united feeling and action is an arrest on the progress of the gospel. The overthrow of the great apostacy, the defeat and confusion of scepticism, and the conversion of the nations, all depend upon the purgation of those errors,—the removal of those schisms,—which would prove like the opening of a mighty flood-gate, to give scope to the pent-up waters of Christian activity and benevolence. Upright and earnest and solemn inquiry can dispel these deleterious, destructive, schismatic errors. May the Lord hasten the day of this consummation!

It were easy to grant that there is a charity which can cure schism; but it is a charity of a rare and peculiar kind. Its foundation is laid in a deep and holy reverence for truth. Its first manifestation consists in a devout personal consecration to the whole law of Christ. Its normal development is found in such a strong and tender affection for our brother-Christians and our fellow-men, that constrains us to spare no effort, and nurse no prejudice, and hesitate at no sacrifice, while labouring to know and to obey *all* our Master's will. For we cannot doubt that it is only in full and unreserved conformity to that will, that

we can avoid placing an unnecessary stumbling-block in the path of the unconverted, or offering a real offence to the weakest of the brethren. Charity is the robe of Truth. As truth unclothed, without her natural drapery of love, may be constrained to blush, so inflated charity without the body of truth will speedily collapse.

IV.—*Conscientiousness in Outward Action.*

Theophilus.—I suppose, my friends, you will admit that it is fair to judge of a tree by its fruits?

Melancthon.—Most certainly. No one who is acquainted with the unhappy consequences of infidel and popish principles upon the state of society will hesitate in condemning them.

Lord Herbert.—But which of two men is worse; he who acts upon the principles which he believes (even admitting them to be wrong), or he who does evil in the face of the principles which he professes to believe? Are not the Protestant Churches overrun with numbers who are worse than their principles?

Bellarmine.—It is even so; and how can we regard those who are so unconscientious in acting upon their avowed principles, as conscientious in adopting them?

Melancthon.—If men are wicked in spite of their good principles, how much worse do they become when their principles are false.

Lord Herbert.—The individual who holds an opinion and acts upon it, can with some plausibility and consistency plead his conscientiousness; but he who acts

contrary to his creed plainly makes shipwreck of his conscience.

Bellarmine.—For this reason we regard the infidel and heathen as better than Protestant schismatics. The latter know their Master's will, and do it not; the former will be able to plead in extenuation of not having done their Master's will, that they knew it not.

Melancthon.—Do unbelievers and implicit believers *not know that they are doing wrong,* when they revile and ridicule the Bible, the glorious gospel, and the faithful followers of Christ?

Lord Herbert.—Do Protestants *not know that they are doing wrong,* when they revile and ridicule each other? "The epithets, Puritans, Methodists, Sectarians, Schismatics, Saints, Evangelicals, Voluntaries, Compulsories, have each in turn been pressed and sworn into the service of party. They are so easily remembered and expeditiously applied, compared with an argument, that numbers who could neither comprehend nor employ the latter, are retained in the cause of faction by means of the former." [1]

Bellarmine.—"And having *once* employed these epithets their anger rises, and their contempt of those against whom the epithets are cast increases in exact proportion to the frequency with which they are repeated. And besides inflaming the passions of those who employ them by *excitement*, they wound and irritate those who are their objects by insult." [2] Protestants are thus convicted,

[1] Union; or, the Divided Church made one. By Rev. John Harris. Second Thousand. London, Ward and Co. P. 150.

[2] Union, pp. 150, 151.

on their own testimony, of some of the grievous charges which they bring against us.

Melancthon.—Do Popish priests *not know that they are doing wrong*, when they hurl their curses from the altar against the innocent and pious? Or if they do not know, are they not on this very account the more guilty, as thus proving themselves reprobate?

Bellarmine.—Do Protestant schismatics *not know that they are doing wrong*, when, "on both sides, historical facts are distorted, Scripture is misquoted and misapplied, faults are blackened and magnified into startling crimes, the rules of argumentative justice are grossly violated, obvious mistakes are eagerly seized and aggravated into intentional falsehood, candid admissions are taken advantage of and turned into grave accusations, the sanctity of private friendship is profaned, old and one-sided information is received and employed in preference to that which is more recent and complete, seeming inconsistencies enlarged on as real contradictions, parts of statements quoted as the whole, and citations perverted so as to convey a meaning contrary to the intention of the author, and of truth?" [1]

Lord Herbert.—And is there not at the same time a large admixture of that powerful ingredient which is stigmatised under the name of hypocrisy, as the *worst form of infidelity*, when "all this is done, too, in the name of the God of Truth and Love—with a plausible affectation of sincere concern for the prosperity of religion." [2]

Theophilus.—What is one of the strongest reasons which you can adduce to shew the blameworthiness of the

[1] Union, pp. 152, 153. [2] Ib. p. 153.

more intelligent Roman Catholic and the intellectual free-thinker?

Melancthon.—The most convincing reason that now occurs to me is, unquestionably, their careless and culpable ignorance of what Christianity really is. Many have never given the gospel a fair hearing at all, and many others have looked at it under the influence of such deep dark prejudices as to render it impossible for them to perceive its glory.

Lord Herbert.—Physician heal thyself. Do you deny that "a large proportion of the religious public confines its readings and intercourse exclusively to its own party?"[1] You charge us with not seeking the truth; but "if *truth* were preferred to triumph, you would remember that it is not the monopoly of a party; and on enlarging the sphere of their reading and observation, sectaries would find much to question where they had hitherto placed implicit confidence, and much to approve where they had previously bestowed all their suspicions and censures."[2]

Bellarmine.—You taunt us with looking on every one outside our pale with jaundiced eyes. But it is notorious that Protestants "are content to hear faults imputed to each other without any examination, and praise lavished on themselves with little qualification; until, having heard for years of nothing concerning their own party but its excellence, nor of their opponents but their errors and evils, it ceases to be wonderful that they should identify all goodness with the former, and feel as if the greatest virtue next to loving and applauding it must consist in vilifying and opposing the latter."[3] Is this charge of

[1] Union, p. 154. [2] Ib. p. 154. [3] Ib. p. 154.

insincerity and partizanship urged so freely against us because it is so rife among yourselves?

Theophilus.—What is the exact nature of the charge which you would bring against the well-informed deist or ultramontane, who in these days of development and progress should continue to reject the Bible and oppose the gospel of Christ?

Melancthon.—Nothing less can be said of the individuals who, with a knowledge of what criticism has done for the word of God, and what history has unfolded of the workings of Popery, yet cling to the sophisms of Voltaire or to the infallibility of the Pope, than that they are hardening their hearts, and searing their consciences as with a hot iron.

Lord Herbert.—What less can be said of any Protestant Church or individual who, with all the divisions, rancorous and multiplied, of the present day full in his view, and with all that the New Testament labours to inculcate respecting union, and with all the guilt and evil which every one knows, and believes, and admits is attached to schism, before his open eyes, has nevertheless to be "respectfully" asked, "whether he has ever considered the possibility—the bare possibility—of *his* being a schismatic? or whether he is prepared to admit the *possibility* that the Church to which he belongs may be in any degree amenable to the charge?"[1] Until "a loud and irresistible cry shall be heard in every Church, calling not merely for individual scrutiny, but for the instant, impartial, and prayerful examination of each Church in its collective capacity,"[2] and until this mighty cry shall burst the fetters of sec-

[1] Union, p. 157. [2] Ib. p. 155.

tarianism, and issue in some movement towards a practical union, such as Jesus Christ is represented as commanding and expecting, we must throw back upon the Protestant community the accusation of "a seared conscience."

Bellarmine.—And so must we. For Protestant Christians either know the scriptural nature and guilt of schism, or they do not. If they do not know them, with the Bible in their hands and their boasted right of private judgment, it is plain as noonday that having eyes they see not, and having ears they hear not, If they *do* know the criminality and evil of schism, and continue to practise it so unblushingly, are they not "holding the truth in unrighteousness?" Are they "receiving the love of the truth?"

Melancthon.—We charge the unbeliever with taking away from the word of God, and the papist with adding to it. But every Protestant believes and professes that his own particular church is founded upon and is agreeable to the word of God.

Lord Herbert.—Do you really mean to assert, or expect us to believe, that every Protestant has "examined the constitution, history, and state of the Church to which he belongs by the standard,"[1] to which he professedly appeals, and to which he desires to make us conform? "Is he satisfied," after sufficient investigation and on palpable grounds, "that were all books except the Bible lost from the earth, his church would find its entire constitution sanctioned and supported by the facts and principles recorded there?"[2] Is every one who *professes* to be so satisfied, without having attained the reality, or having

[1] Union, p. 159. [2] Ib. p. 159.

attained it sluggishly, and summarily, and illegitimately, not "feeding on ashes?"

Bellarmine.—We are condemned most peremptorily for professing infallibility; but is there not "a class amongst you who persuade themselves that their Church is perfect,—that Infinite Perfection could not say to it, 'I have somewhat against thee?'"[1] And of those who have not this persuasion, is every one "searching for the beam or the mote? Does he deplore it? and is he ready to assist in casting it out?"[2] If any one does not so act, he condemns himself in the thing which he allows. Now, point, if you can, to the Protestant Church which does not either confess to imposing unscriptural terms of communion, and thus seals its own condemnation, or pleads that it is perfect, and that nothing can be found against it.

Melancthon.—Infidelity, by taking away religion, saps the very foundations of morality; and Popery, by its multitudinous edicts, brings dark confusion over the whole code of morals. Both are thus found *approving* and *sanctioning* offences, which otherwise would only be connived at.

Lord Herbert.—The charge again recoils upon yourselves. "While schism is branded by universal consent, and while parties have been bandying the charge, and criminating each other, anxious only on which the *charge* should finally settle, how insensible have they been to the fact that they were meanwhile familiarising themselves, in common, with the sin itself, drinking into its spirit, presenting to the world a spectacle of ridicule and reproach, and frustrating the very ends for which a Church has been

[1] Union, p. 159. [2] Ib. p. 159.

instituted, and for which Christianity is continued on earth."[1]

Bellarmine.—We are accused of cancelling the second commandment of the decalogue; but "a spirit of contention and division is, in effect, a repeal of the whole evangelical law. In six of the epistles it is affirmed, that 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' The law of love to God and man, which was proclaimed from Sinai, has been republished from Calvary, enforced by more appropriate and powerful motives, and constituted the grand practical characteristic of the Christian economy. But schism is the breach of Christian love, and consequently a violation of the whole Christian law."[2] *We*, surely, are innocent, when compared with such wholesale rebellion!

Melancthon.—It is a monstrous logic that would associate the evils of Protestant schisms with the horrors of the French atheistic revolution, or with the atrocities of the Inquisition, or the abominations of cloistered hypocrisy.

Lord Herbert.—Let the question be settled on your own principles. "The *scriptural classification of this sin* illustrates its vile and aggravated nature, for it stands associated, both in its origin and tendencies, with many of the principal sins. 1 Cor. iii. 3; 2 Cor. xii. 20; Gal. v. 15–21. Here, its origin is imputed to carnality, to the lusts of the flesh, to the predominence of the sinful and worldly over the renewed and spiritual part of our nature; many of the baser passions are found in its company, either as its offspring or congenial associates; and it is represented as degrading its victims, in some respects, below

[1] Union, p. 171. [2] Ib. p. 173.

the mere level of humanity, into beasts of prey, who return bite for bite, and are 'consumed one of another.'"[1]

Bellarmine.—Protestants are indignant against us, because the Catechism of Trent declares that the priest, in the confessional, is in the place of God. Now, it is plain, as has been already seen, that to make any one thing a term of Christian communion, for which there is not express divine authority, is schismatical. What Protestant Church is guiltless of this charge? It "amounts to *a virtual usurpation of the throne of Christ*, and of his highest prerogative as Lord of conscience. Rom. xiv.; James iv. 11. According to these scriptures, among the highest rights which Christ has acquired by his sacrificial death, are those which relate to the conscience, so that to attempt to impose our appointments on the conscience of another, or to denounce him for not subordinating his conscience to ours, is to ascend the tribunal, displace the Saviour, put on the brightest of his many crowns, and tyrannise where he should reign,—an invasion of his throne which he will not fail to resent."[2] *We* are guiltless of this heavy accusation, inasmuch as *Christ's vicegerent* is at our head.

Melancthon.—You now assume that the Pope *is really* the vicegerent of Christ Jesus our Lord. To admit this is to wreath around our limbs the chains of spiritual despotism. "Man's faith, or his worship, can approve itself to God as an expression of love, only in so far as it approves itself to his own conviction as that which the word of God requires. To form and follow his own convictions of the revealed will of God is an inalienable right, of which no human being can justly deprive him, and an imperative

[1] Union, p. 174. [2] Ib. pp. 174, 175.

duty, from which no created authority can absolve him." [1]

Lord Herbert.—And in the exercise of this "inalienable right," "to form and follow your own convictions of the revealed will of God," your different denominations find their origin and support. Elsewhere you maintain, that "losing sight of the common interests of the Christian Church, each party appoints terms of communion with itself, which *disparage and virtually repeal the bond of scriptural union.*" [2] Now, this perpetual appeal, sometimes to conscience, and sometimes to the Bible, we could well understand, provided conscience and the Bible were always at one. But to be urged in one paragraph to follow our own convictions, and anon to be told that they who are supposed to be following conscience are repealing the law of God, is as dark a confusion, and as sore a perplexity, as any of the difficulties of infidelity. We profess to obey conscience in rejecting the Bible. You profess to be the disciples of both, but by bringing them thus into collision, both are utterly degraded.

Bellarmine.—Our Church union and fellowship is depreciated, and censured as being that of slaves, with an outward fence constraining to an apparent harmony, while inside the inclosure all is variance and turmoil. But what better is the state of so-called Evangelical Christendom? By "each party appointing terms of communion with itself which disparage and virtually repeal the bond of scriptural union," "*the brotherly love which ought to subsist between the Churches of Christ is made impossible*, and a *masked affectation of charity passes in its stead.* It would

[1] Union, pp. 219, 220. [2] Ib. p. 181.

be a self-contradiction for children of the same parent to profess that they cherish a very tender affection for each other, and yet refuse to sit at the same table, or to exchange the mutual expressions of fraternal love. And equally absurd and hypocritical is it for the members of different Churches to pretend that their attachment to real Christians, of whatever name, is sincere, and yet withhold from them the obvious and natural evidences of love. They mistake worldly politeness for the sanctified ardour of Christian love. Instead of cordially welcoming them to the table of the Lord, and to the intimacies of Christian fellowship, they content themselves with the bare avoidance of rudeness, and say, 'Depart in peace.' Instead of pouring in oil and wine into their smarting wounds, they consider it praise-worthy forbearance that they do not inflict an additional stab, and 'pass by on the other side.' How cutting the sarcasm which should now say, 'See how these Christians love,' when they have only just religion enough to hate; when they call on Christians to come out from their fellow-Christians, and to come over to themselves, as loudly as they call on the irreligious to come out from the world, and be separate; when they rejoice in an instance of proselytism more than in a conversion; when the sect of the schismatical, including members of all Churches, is the most active, numerous, and extending sect of the day; and when a scant and gauzy affectation of charity is supposed to be an adequate substitute for the warm and ample robe of Christian love." [1]

Melancthon.—We sorrowfully admit that the excesses which have now been specified have too frequently oc-

[1] Union, pp. 182, 183.

curred, and have no wish to palliate, far less justify them. But the principle on which we desire to take our stand is at least sound.

Lord Herbert.—Granting, for the sake of argument in the meantime, that your principle is unassailable, what shall be said, if the majority of Protestant Christians, habitually and generally, set it at defiance? Is it not time that the minority were preparing a second *Protest*, as the precursor of a second Reformation?

Bellarmine.—And, of course, till this be done, the first Protest of the sixteenth century is ignored, or rather repudiated. But what is your principle?

Melancthon.—"In the common reception of the Bible as the Word of God, and in the acknowledgment of its supremacy, together with the consequent duty of every man to follow his conscientious views of its dictates, is laid the foundation, and the only foundation, on which can be built the temple of Christian peace." [1]

Bellarmine.—Very fair indeed. But when men, following each "his conscientious views of the dictates of the Bible," come into collision with each other on momentous and vital points, where is the foundation for the temple of peace? Experience shows us only explosions and earthquakes.

Melancthon.—My reply is twofold. On *vital* matters Christians are at one. And, secondly, "should a difference of opinion obtain concerning the interpretation of any part (of our authorised guide, God's Word), we ought to regard each other as following his conscientious views of that authority, and love each other on that account." [2]

[1] Union, p. 221. [2] Ib. 221.

Lord Herbert.—Waiving any answer to your first remark, which will come to be fully discussed hereafter, as to the second, it may be observed, that if "the difference of opinion" be in regard to some trifle, it cannot justify, or with any show of reason occasion, denominational fortifications, or alienation of heart. But if it involve such weighty matter as necessitates any sort of separation between the dissentient parties, then how they can "love each other *on that account*" passes comprehension. If it be said they love each other, because each believes his neighbour to be "following his conscientious views," then how can you believe in conscience at all, or in truth, or in God, if, on important questions, one man's conscience comes inevitably into conflict with the conscience of another man?

Bellarmine.—Besides, even supposing that separation could be at first vindicated on such weak principles as have now been adduced, this separation would not meet the evil, or mend it. The evil would thereby only be aggravated, and extended, and prolonged. "It is in the nature of things, that those who differ from each other, and who have proclaimed that difference to the world by taking their stand in separate parties, should be anxious to justify their respective grounds of difference. But by shutting themselves up in separate enclosures, they deprive themselves of the opportunity, and even lose the desire, of mutual explanation; and, by shutting others out, they prejudice them against their peculiar sentiments, even though founded in truth. 'The wall of separation is continually strengthened, each party fortifying it *on his own side.*' Their pride is engaged to maintain their respective

opinions; for, having avowed them, their surrender would be deemed a surrender of honour. The Bible itself is made a partisan; ground for new discrepancies are there fancied or descried; and, consequently, additional reasons for receding a step farther off. New subjects of contention arise; new antagonists rush to the conflict; new materials for continuing and extending the war are collected; and each party would fain enforce the law of Solon, compelling every one to range under one or other of the contending banners, till the whole Church should be embroiled." [1]

Theophilus.—The issue of this part of the discussion appears to be, that the principles of Christian union, so far as they are commonly understood and generally recognised, are, to a large extent, and often in a very shameless manner, practically disregarded and disobeyed. To whatever extent this practical neglect and defiance of the first great law of Christianity prevails in the Protestant community, to the same extent is this community inconsistent, and powerless in all its assaults either upon the despotism of Rome, or the delusions of scepticism. Nay more, this broad and palpable, because practical, inconsistency, exerts an invisible, perhaps, but certainly an inevitable and most pernicious reaction upon the efforts of the holiest men, and upon the measures of the devoutest wisdom.

Furthermore, as to the principles of union now more immediately under review, we are led to the same conclusion as before. We have found it to be a first and unquestionable position, that concord and conscientiousness are never at variance; in other words, the men who legitimately, that is, honestly and diligently, use their under-

[1] Union, pp. 183, 184.

standing in forming their convictions on all matters of truth and duty, will not come into contradiction and conflict, such as to endanger the unity and harmony of the body of Christ. Unless this be assumed as a fundamental and all-pervading principle, we shall seek in vain for any place of refuge strong enough to enable us to defy, at once the wild wasting surges of unbelief, and the envenomed shafts of spiritual tyranny.

Let this principle be granted, and we can perceive something like a suitable and stable foundation among intelligent beings, whereon to erect an altar of peace and a shrine of unanimity. For whenever the olive branch is removed from that shrine, or broken at that altar, the criminality of the outrage lies on some individual, who has in its perpetration not only offended against external order and sacredness, but also against the venerable monitor within his own bosom.

DIALOGUE II.

THE LIMITS OF IDENTITY OF OPINION.

I.—*Common Ground and Fundamental Truth.*

Theophilus.—The question which is now to be considered is this, How shall we distinguish between those matters on which unanimity of sentiment is necessary to Christian fellowship, and those other matters on which identity of opinion may be dispensed with?

Melancthon.—Our answer to that question is at hand, and seems to be perfectly satisfactory. "Unity in essentials; in non-essentials liberty; in *all things* charity."

Lord Herbert.—Your answer is by no means satisfactory till you have pointed out the difference between essentials and non-essentials.

Melancthon.—Essentials may be characterised as "THE MAIN DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL."[1]

Lord Herbert.—Then are Christians universally agreed as to what those things are which constitute "the main doctrines of the gospel;" or can you state any canon or rule, by the application of which these "main doctrines" may be surely discriminated from the secondary or non-essential points?

[1] Schism, p. 390.

Bellarmine.—Many who call themselves Christians are by no means agreed as to what they believe to be "the main doctrines of the gospel." But Christians, who are not heretics, are agreed in *all* the doctrines of our holy religion. For this distinction between essentials and non-essentials is a Protestant device to palliate and defend endless divisions. For whatever properly belongs to religion is truly sacred; and to attempt to introduce among sacred things a lower and a higher grade, is virtually to desecrate them altogether.

Melancthon.—You must admit at all events that you have taught us the lesson. Your distinction between venial and mortal sins does indeed amount to an authoritative sanction on the part of your Church in favour of iniquity. The ancient theory about the purity of celibacy, moreover, which your councils have endorsed, really throws discredit upon the honour and holiness of matrimony, and opens a wide door for licentiousness. There are no such evil consequences attached to the principle which separates essentials and non-essentials, as it is held in Protestant Christendom.

Lord Herbert.—If the principle be indeed unsound and illusory, you will not deny that its bitter fruits will sooner or later appear. That it is unsound, or at least inconsistent with some of your other principles, requires little argument to make manifest. You maintain that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,—that whatever the Bible inculcates is clothed with Divine authority. Whatever rests upon *this* authority is surely obligatory in the same degree or to the same extent. Among doctrines which are all equally true, or among commands which

are all equally binding, how can some be essential, and others non-essential?

Melancthon.—"Happily, Christians have now no excuse for standing aloof from each other, on the plea that there is 'no neutral, or common ground.' If such a plea were ever tolerable, that time has passed away—and may it no more return! But such a plea was never valid, either in the court of heaven, or in that of conscience. No common ground among Christians! May the peculiarities that distinguish them, then, never be forgotten in the discharge of common duties, and the defence of fundamental truths? The truth itself is *common ground.*"[1]

Lord Herbert.—These remarks do not remove the difficulty which has been pointed out. They reiterate the distinction between what is common to all and what is peculiar to each; but they do not help us to determine whether or not in a special case a peculiarity *should be* common, or what is *called* common is *really* only peculiar. When a sect maintains that its peculiarity belongs, or should belong, to the *common ground*, how is the claim to to be disposed of? Is this common ground always unchangeable, or is it liable to diminution or increase? And again, is there not *common ground* between you and us, as well as between your own rival sects; and if there be, why should not you unite with us in the discharge of common duties and the defence of fundamental truths? Besides, you have not even attempted to reconcile the inconsistency which was already noticed.

Bellarmine.—One thing is enough at a time. We might join issue on the single statement, "the truth itself is com-

[1] Schism, p. 391.

mon ground." This is *our* maxim, which Protestants have sadly abused. We understand it to mean, that the common ground is *all* truth, and truth *only*. Hence the creed of the Catholic Church contains *all* that is to be believed, and *only* what is to be believed. But you Protestants, in asserting that there is a common ground on which you stand, which you call the truth, assert also, each of you for himself, that there is truth in his own peculiarities, as good and valid truth as what is found in the common ground. Hence it is incorrect to say, that "the truth itself is common ground" to Protestants.

Melancthon.—The truth, in which we are all agreed, is surely common ground.

Bellarmine.—But that statement is a mere tautology.

Melancthon.—Well, then, Protestant Christians are agreed, as formerly stated, in things essential. And "the more any speculations, true or false, which form no part of the essential doctrine of salvation, are insisted on as important, the more numerous are the sources of schismatical division."[1]

Lord Herbert.—But do you not see that such a wise caution is wide of the mark, till you shall be pleased to tell us, what is "the essential doctrine of salvation," or how we shall be able to determine it?

Bellarmine.—And how can you maintain that what is true is not important? You elsewhere speak of "a forbearing mutual indulgence up to the last limit of truth."[2] Here you must mean, I suppose, essential or important truth. So that Protestant liberty becomes a license to trifle with certain truths, by calling them non-essential or unimportant.

[1] Schism, p. 343. [2] Ib. p. 66.

Melancthon.—"The tendency to indulge, beyond the letter of Scripture, in positive declarations respecting what is to be believed, ill becomes fallible mortals, though no period of the Church has been exempt from this evil. Even venerable antiquity, and the desire to guard the truth against heresy, will not consecrate any approach towards the confines of presumption."[1]

Lord Herbert.—This seems to me to be giving up the whole question. According to this statement it follows. that whoever professes to adhere to "the letter of Scripture" is to be regarded as embracing "the essential doctrine of salvation," and occupying "the common ground!" What is this but *implicit faith?*

Bellarmine.—And if it be "presumption" "to indulge in positive declarations" "beyond the letter of Scripture," is it not an equal presumption to go *amongst* the letters and words of Scripture, and indulge a tendency to call some of them important and essential, and some of them indifferent? Is this, indeed, Protestant reverence for the Word of God?

Melancthon.—"As private friendship consists harmoniously with benevolence towards all mankind; so a conscientious attachment to those modes and forms which we judge most in accordance with the will of God, receives a beauty and a grace when accompanied with a brotherly affection for the whole Church of Christ. For those to unite in stated worship who most agree in rites and church order, is a proceeding which human imperfection seems to call for, and which is most calculated to promote edification. But, surely, he whose heart is the abode of

[1] Schism, p. 344.

charity—the grand principle of the Christian religion—will seek to carry union with other Christians to the utmost possible extent. His preference for any particular mode of church government and worship, will not be allowed to interfere with his intercourse and Christian co-operation with those who entertain other views. Instead of manifesting towards them a distant behaviour—much less a decided aversion, or a marked hostility—will he not embrace opportunities of recognising them before the world as his brethren, disciples of the same Master, and having the same ends in view—human happiness, and the Divine glory? Will he not rejoice when occasion offers—nay, will he not *seek* occasion to engage with them in some good work, sacrificing all external differences at the shrine of Christian love, and for the sake of *the gospel itself?*" [1]

Lord Herbert.—The climax of your argument, then, is this: to "sacrifice all external differences at the shrine of Christian love, and for the sake of *the gospel itself.*" These "external differences," however, involve matters of duty and truth. This is obvious from your own language, when you speak of "a conscientious attachment to those modes and forms which you judge most in accordance with the will of God." It is further obvious from the nature of the case; for if there be neither truth nor duty implicated in these "external differences," then they should not exist at all. Now, what do you mean by talking of the sacrifice of any iota of truth or duty "at the shrine of Christian love, and for the sake *of the gospel itself?*" I always thought that Christians boasted of the

[1] Schism, pp. 390, 391.

purity of Christian love, and of the harmony between the gospel and truth! But now it would appear that they are not only to "embrace opportunities," but to rejoice when occasion offers, nay to *seek* occasion, that they may sacrifice duty at the shrine of love and truth for the sake of the gospel! Is this not setting ecclesiastical law against moral and divine law—one of the foulest manifestations of Popery?

Bellarmine.—Nay, rather, is it not a deep delusion of infidelity, which attains its deadly purpose, by arraying one truth against another truth, and duty against duty. To say that a man's "preference for any particular mode of church government and worship will not be allowed to interfere with his intercourse and Christian co-operation with those who entertain other views," is thorough trifling. It does so in fact; it cannot but do so. If men hold conflicting views about church government and worship, or even if they *act* upon their "preferences for particular modes," is it not a necessary and invariable consequence, that their religious intercourse and co-operation are restricted and curtailed, and a leash of prejudices is let loose on both sides? If, then, you are drawn by one set of conscientious principles to harmony and communion with each other, and by another set of conscientious principles restrained and embarrassed in your intercourse, you are no better than the sceptic. For my own part, I had rather believe nothing at all, than be racked and torn by conflicting beliefs. To plead that "human imperfection seems to call for such a proceeding," is to resort to the pantheist's argument, that whatever is, is right.

Theophilus.—It is unquestionably correct to say, that

there is "common ground" belonging to the various Protestant sects. But it is also true that there is common ground to the Christian and the infidel, as well as to the Papist and the Protestant. When there is *no common ground* to two parties, there can be no argument between them; the one has no means of convincing, or confuting, or gaining the other. The determination of the limits of this common ground in each of the cases now specified, and in a precise and accurate form, is of the very utmost consequence. Supposing that the common ground at present occupied by Protestant denominations were correctly delineated, this delineation would not necessarily include *all* essential truth, and *only* essential truth; neither would it heal the divisions produced by contradictory judgments, nor could it prevent or medicate in an efficient manner the grievous evil of these divisions.

What *is* common ground at any one time, may not coincide with what *ought to be* common ground, which some might designate essential truth, but which may be more appropriately called *fundamental truth.* But our knowledge of this common ground, or fundamental truth, must ever continue vague and unsatisfactory and useless for social purposes, if we are debarred from all "positive declarations of what is to be believed," "beyond the letter of Scripture." Unless the Church has some means or other of generalizing the statements of the Bible by comparing fact with fact, and oracle with oracle, and unless these generalizations may be legitimately embodied in definite propositions, in which all true disciples may reasonably be expected to acquiesce, the Christian faith can never be expected to become universally and *manifestly*

prevalent among intelligent men, nor can it ever cope with and overcome completely the intellectual forms of infidelity.

The distinction between things essential and non-essential is one obviously liable to serious objections, some of which have been already stated. This point is not immediately before us at present, but one thing begins to be apparent from what has been advanced, namely, that if the identity of opinion which is indispensable to Christian fellowship be limited to essential truths, as they are called, Christian union cannot be expected to acquire consolidation, and advance towards maturity, without a distinct and satisfactory enunciation of these truths. Another thing is equally apparent; the Christian Church, it is said, is founded on the conscientious agreement of its members on these essential truths; while it is maintained, at the same time, that there is no such thing as a conscientious disbelief or rejection of these truths, or, if there be, it is blameworthy. Now, then, it must be shown, how there can be a conscientious and blameless rejection or denial of non-essential truth, while there can be no such conscientious and blameless denial or rejection of truth that is essential.

Hence the defenders of the distinction between essentials and non-essentials, so far as it bears upon our present discussion, are called not only to prove the reality of this distinction, and state precisely what is its character, but also to show that it is of such a nature, that while there is room for conscientious or innocent contradiction in regard to the one class of truths, there is no room for such contradiction in regard to the other class.

Melancthon.—"The foundation of a scriptural union among Christians is laid in the belief of those truths which are essential to our union with Christ. But how are these truths (it is asked), few and simple as they may be, to be discriminated and determined? Had this question never engaged our attention before, we should naturally adopt some or all of the following methods; we should inquire whether, on a devout and careful perusal of the gospel as a whole, Christians generally have received an *identity* of impression as to its scope and design;—whether it contained within its pages anything professing to be an epitome or abridgment of the system which it reveals;—whether the apostolic preaching contained any one leading feature;—or, whether the question of *fundamental truth* was ever agitated in apostolic times, and determined by apostolic authority? Now, on adopting this course of inquiry, we not only obtain replies,—and these replies not merely agree,—but, by the unanimous verdict of the orthodox Church, they all prove to be *one;* and that one, *the doctrine of justification by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ.*" [1]

Lord Herbert.—Allowing your statement to be perfectly accurate so far as it goes, a word of explanation is still required. Supposing several Christians to take up a common position on the truth now specified, there are two distinct senses in which that truth may be regarded as fundamental. This fundamental truth may be considered either as the sum total of what is necessary to be held in common, allowing diversity or contradiction on every other subject; or it may be regarded only as the starting point,

[1] Union, pp. 65, 66.

by advancing from which Christians shall come to unanimity of sentiment on many other topics. If a harmonious belief in this fundamental truth be asserted to be of itself sufficient to secure a desirable Christian union, notwithstanding any other conflicting sentiments that may prevail in the associated community, we shall, then, have to look narrowly to its definition and meaning, and may find serious difficulties in coming to a clear and satisfactory settlement of the question. If, on the other hand, this fundamental truth be held only as the first article of agreement, to which, from time to time, others may be expected to be added, then there is less occasion for any rigid examination of this first article; but still we are as far as ever from the answer to the inquiry with which we have now to do, What is the limit of the identity of opinion which is needful to ensure Christian union?

Bellarmine.—As no Protestant will be bold enough to say, that *all* Christian truth may with any plausibility be included in the dogma just announced, it follows, that to build the Christian Church not only *on* this truth alone, but *with* this truth alone, allowing within the Church scope for every heresy not directly opposed to it, is to make the Church a scandalous receptacle for many sorts of error, as the holy Catholic Church has been falsely accused of doing. And if this boasted article of a falling or a standing Church be admitted to be only the beginning of Protestant unanimity, it may fairly be questioned whether or not the unanimity has yet really begun. For every one that has read Protestant theologians must know, that around their fundamental assumption of *justification by*

faith alone, several keen and weighty controversies have long been, and still are, pending.

Melancthon.—" Here is an apostolic canon (Rom. xiv. 3. xv. 1–7) for the regulation of the conduct of such Christians as fundamentally agree, while they differ on points of subordinate importance—a canon which imperatively requires them to exercise a reciprocal toleration and indulgence—to give each other credit for a conscientious deference to the will of Christ—to view each other as mutually received of God—and all this that they may on no account proceed to an open rupture. So that all the parties which at present divide the Church, owing to diversities of opinion which are not inconsistent with salvation, exist in open violation of this sacred canon, impeach the inspired wisdom which enjoins it, and repeal all those commands of mutual toleration which harmonise with its spirit." [1]

Bellarmine.—If we do not greatly misunderstand this language, it urgently contends for a principle which was formerly denied, and severely condemns the mass of Protestant denominationalists. It shows that when denominations can plead in defence of their existence only " diversities of opinion which are not inconsistent with salvation," they are unscriptural, schismatical, and highly criminal.

Lord Herbert.—This language also shows in which of the two senses specified agreement in fundamental truth is taken. Fundamental agreement is here regarded as final and definite, not initiative and progressive. Since, then, you regard the fundamental harmony of which you speak as something precise, settled, and unchanging, we

[1] Union, p. 277.

beg to press the inquiry, in what does it consist? Does it include nothing else but "the doctrine of justification by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ?"

Melancthon.—"This parent truth *necessarily* involves in it, (according to our apprehension), the divinity of Christ, the necessity of renewal and sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and whatever is commonly called evangelical in doctrine; while it sprinkles the path of duty with atoning blood, and is the seminal principle of universal holiness. But whatever the precise amount of truth which it may comprehend, it is evidently *the* doctrine by the humble and hearty belief of which a man becomes united to Christ, and consequently one with his people. Whatever variety of sentiment he may hold on subordinate points, the cordial reception of 'redemption through the blood of the Cross' unites him to 'the Head of the body,' and through the Head to the body itself. Whatever the order and discipline of the particular Church to which he may belong, his union to Christ, being derived from an independent and superior source, is left untouched, as well as his union to the body of Christ. And that Church itself, teaching this faith, and composed of such members, is a true Church, and an integral part of the great Christian community."[1]

Lord Herbert.—In the first place, this is not answering the question which is before us, and which, we have seen, must be answered, if we would converse intelligently about Christian union. This union, you affirm, consists in identity of opinion on some points, but not on all points, of faith and practice. The question is, what are the points

[1] Union, p. 68.

on which identity of opinion is indispensable? Your reply is, "whatever is commonly called evangelical in doctrine!!" And you speak as if no one had fixed, and no one could fix, "the precise amount of truth which it may comprehend!"

In the second place, you reason on the supposition, that no man who is "united to Christ" can incur the guilt of schism. You affirm that there is one doctrine, *the* doctrine, which, if a man humbly and heartily believe, he is thereby united to Christ himself, and to the Church, the "*true*" Church, "whatever variety of sentiment he may hold on subordinate points," and "whatever the order and discipline of the particular Church to which he may belong." In this statement you virtually deny that there can by any possibility be such a thing as schism. For if an individual do not believe this doctrine of which you speak, he is not united to Christ, and therefore not a Christian, I suppose. Hence he cannot be a party at all in a schism: in your language he is a heathen man and a publican, an alien and an outcast. On the other hand, if any one does believe this doctrine, he is thereby not only a Christian, but a member of the true Church; consequently, he is not a schismatic; and, therefore, there is no room for schism at all. If you shall say that you mean he is a member of the true *invisible* Church, but not necessarily of the Church *visible*, your argument falls to the ground.

Bellarmine.—That is precisely our doctrine. On our principles a man cannot leave the holy Catholic Church, which is undoubtedly the only true Church, without becoming a contumacious heretic, and forfeiting all title to be recognised as a Christian, in the proper sense of that

designation. There is, however, a notable difference between us and Protestants, namely, that we hold this principle in harmony with the other principle "that unity is a sign of the true Church."[1] They, on the other hand, cannot hold both principles, except each denomination shall claim to be the true Church alone and entire. And the sect which claims to be the only true Church unchristianizes and unchurches all other sects. If a man cannot be united to Christ without being at the same instant united to the visible body of Christ, and if there be good and genuine Christians in the different Protestant sects, then is unity no longer a sign of the true Church; and the author that has been quoted might have spared his empty flourish, "that unscripturally to expel a single Christian, or to disturb the harmony of a single church, is to break the peace of the universe."[2] The unscriptural expulsion of a Christian is inconceivable on his principles.

Melancthon.—"The only plan which now remains for the Church to pursue, proceeds on the Catholic principle of uniting on the great basis of evangelical doctrine, in which we already agree, and of exercising mutual forbearance on all subordinate matters. This is the scriptural plan."[3]

Lord Herbert.—This is only an iteration of your opinion. We perceive no attempt fairly to meet the difficulty which it obviously involves.

Bellarmine.—But is the statement now made really consistent with facts? If there be a "great basis of evangelical doctrine in which all Protestants are already

[1] Union, p. 56. [2] Ib. p. 56. [3] Ib. p. 235.

agreed," it surely would not be very difficult to produce it in a tangible or visible form before the world.

Melancthon.—" Excellent documents have been drawn up from time to time by the healing spirits of the Church, under the names of ' Declarations,' ' Comprehensions,' and ' Forms of Agreement'—to be subscribed by the Christians of different persuasions as the basis of their union. We confess, however, that we have no faith in the utility of such measures as the means of promoting union. *That* union, to be scriptural, must be the *effect* of love : if that love exists already, such subscriptions are unnecessary : and if it do not, subscription is a poor substitute for it. Besides which, such documents themselves are almost certain, sooner or later, to become the occasions of contention." [1]

Lord Herbert.—I humbly apprehend that you have changed ground. We were first told that " evangelical *doctrine*" is the great basis of union. Now you assert that union must be " the effect of *love;*" and if " that love exists already," " subscription " to a form of doctrine is " unnecessary." Nor do you favour us with a hint respecting any other plan, by which agreement in doctrine may be secured, or tested, or proclaimed.

Bellarmine.—Besides, the large majority of Protestant denominations make subscription to doctrinal articles imperative. This proves that the general opinion among them is, that such subscription is necessary to the realization of union. When such documents become the occasions of contention, this may arise either from the errors of a particular document, or from the extravagance of the con-

[1] Union, p. 237.

tenders. The propriety and necessity of using such documents, therefore, seem to be unquestionable.

Theophilus.—It is vain to talk of Christian union, as if it could be "the effect of love," independently of, or severed from, agreement in doctrine. It is equally futile to suppose that this union could consist in doctrinal harmony without the cement of affection. Its basis must be by "speaking the truth in love," to "grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." What is spoken may, of course, be written. There does not seem, therefore, any reasonable prospect of a general, long-continued, satisfactory, and palpable union, apart from some acknowledged Confession of Faith other than the Bible.

So far as an acknowledged Confession of Faith contains *error*, or a positive denial of any truth whatever, it becomes a culpable cause of schism. The Confession of Faith, therefore, which will be the proof and pledge of union—the palpable development of an union already attained, and the means of securing, perpetuating, and extending that union, ought to admit of no *corrections;* though, at the same time, it may clearly be susceptible of many *additions.* For there is no doubt that there are certain fundamental truths on which the association of Christian men with each other must be based. These truths must be understood by every member of the association, or the association is not one of intelligent beings. But truths which are understood admit of being expressed in language. Nay, unless they are expressed in language, they cannot become the common bond of a numerous society.

The basis of Christian union, then, must be agreement

in certain great truths, clearly stated and cordially accepted. The statement of such truths ought to be accurate so far as it goes, but it need not be exhaustive. The truths which are embodied in such a statement will be the conditions of fellowship, so that the denial of one or more of them will necessarily exclude the party who makes the denial from Christian communion. As the disciples grow in knowledge by the full meaning of Scripture being elicited, and the ways of Providence understood, nothing seems more reasonable than to expect, that new articles shall be added from time to time to the recognised creed of the Christian community.

Every matter which is not explicitly determined in this creed, ought to be one of mutual forbearance. By mutual forbearance, we mean something very different from what is commonly understood by those terms. They are often supposed to mean, that when the parties contradict and oppose each other on some weighty question, both parties are to hold each his own opinion most tenaciously, and at the same time to respect his neighbour as much as if there was no such difference between them. Such a method of procedure is altogether incongruous, and can be palliated only on sceptical principles. The reasonable and scriptural forbearance that is expected from Christian men towards each other, in regard to questions of moment on which they are not at one, is chiefly to avoid on both sides hasty and dogmatic conclusions.

The avoidance of ill-considered and positive assertions implies the practical observance of two distinct principles. In the first place, when we are in danger of coming into collision with any of our Christian brethren on an affair of

truth or duty, we ought to be specially careful and conscientious in the examination of that affair, as well as slow in making up our judgment, and cautious and moderate in the manner of announcing it. In the second place, when we have found the truth, we ought sedulously to distinguish between those who merely *doubt* the propriety or rectitude of our views, and those who openly and directly deny it. In both these ways there is abundance of opportunity for the exercise of meekness and long-suffering among Christians, with the view of preventing schism. When schism is actually accomplished, a precious season for the manifestation of forbearance is irrevocably past; and schism is actually developed when two brethren take up, openly and decidedly, conflicting and antagonistic views on any grave question of doctrine or duty.

When schism thus occurs an open rupture is almost inevitable; or, if it be prevented by inferior motives or external circumstances, there will be a secret rupture equally disastrous to every Christian interest. Hence there are no points of *such* subordinate or inferior importance that Christians may conscientiously and innocently *contradict* each other thereon. If the points are really subordinate, involving only matters of probability, there is no place for so-called conscientious collision, and no plea for separate organizations, for the minority should in all such cases yield to the majority. If the points imply a revealed doctrine or a moral obligation, then collision, as we have seen, cannot arise without culpability attaching to one of the parties. It is this circumstance which renders separation necessary, and at the same time stamps it with the guilt of schism.

Nothing can be more extravagant than to suppose that a man who is a true or genuine disciple of Christ cannot commit the sin of schism; or, in other words, to imagine that the guilt of schism inevitably dooms every one who may be involved in it as a reprobate or an apostate. Hence, to speak of those truths which unite a man to Christ, or are essential to his salvation, as if they were the very same as those on which identity of opinion is indispensable to Christian union, is really to mistake the question at issue. In regard to the great truth of justification by faith alone, we can say of it even, that it is essential to salvation only in a modified sense. For the modern Christian Church has a much clearer and firmer hold of it than had the ancient Christian Church. While the Jewish Church before Christ, and the antediluvian Church, must have had less full and definite views regarding it. And we have yet to learn that it is altogether impossible for a heathen to be saved who is unavoidably ignorant of it. This same truth is, no doubt, one of those on which Christian union must be based, and is expressed, perhaps, with sufficient accuracy for the present time, if it be taken not as a complete and definite statement of the basis of union, but as one article among several, to which also additions must be made in process of time, as the Church "groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord."

II.—*Things Indifferent.*

Melancthon.—"The Apostles valued not *indifferences* at all, and those things it is evident that they accounted

such, which whether men did them or not, was not of concernment to salvation." [1]

Bellarmine.—Is this text not in the Protestant Bible—"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God?" Or is coming short of the glory of God "not of concernment to salvation?"

Melancthon.—"Without all controversies, the main inlet of all the distractions, confusions, and divisions of the Christian world, hath been by adding other conditions of church-communion than Christ hath done." [2]

Lord Herbert.—What denomination is there in the whole Christian world that has not instituted, or dares deny that it has instituted, "other conditions of church-communion than Christ hath done?"

Melancthon.—Let me explain my meaning by adducing an example:—"St Paul, in the case of the *Jews*, treated the Mosaic rites as *things indifferent*, declaring that 'circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.'—1 Cor. vii. 19." [3]

Lord Herbert.—When you state that "the Mosaic rites were treated as things indifferent," your words are susceptible of two meanings. You may mean that circumcision, and such like, *in so far as they are mere bodily exercises*, are in themselves of no moral or religious value. You cannot intend to affirm that the observance of the ceremonial law, as commanded by God, was a matter of indifference or a non-essential to the Jews before Christ came. The second meaning which your words will bear is this, that to the Jews who lived immediately after

[1] Schism, p. 373. [2] Ib. p 373. [3] Ib. p. 69.

Christ, and before the destruction of their temple, it was optional to observe the law or not, as they chose. Inasmuch as Christ had come, circumcision, you say, was abolished; but inasmuch as any one was a Jew, he might, if he desired, observe the ceremonial law himself, provided he did not attempt to force others, especially Gentiles, to conform.

Now, in which of these senses do you affirm that your denominational peculiarities are matters of indifference? If they be optional, and involve no obligation as of truth or duty, which is universally binding, it is surely making too much of them to represent them as constraining your consciences, and compelling you to make them terms of communion. Again, if in themselves they be indifferent, like some mere bodily act, and if there be no Divine command respecting them to clothe them with spiritual importance and authority, then the sooner they sink into their native insignificance and totally disappear, the better surely it will be.

Bellarmine.—Circumcision was ordained by God, as all the world owns. But when will Protestant sectaries persuade each other, or the world, that all their endless *isms* have been commanded by the Most High! If circumcision may be regarded in any sense as a thing indifferent, their self-invented and fantastic sectarism is surely tenfold more indifferent still.

Melancthon.—Let us take another example. "Some of the Hebrew Christians at Rome supposed the *meats prohibited* in the Mosaic law to be unclean *in themselves*, and therefore not to be eaten. They also believed that the *Jewish festivals* ought still to be observed. The Gentile

believers, on the other hand, regarded these observances as part of an economy that had passed away. Hence, harsh judgments arose on both sides. But St Paul exhorted all to mutual forbearance and charity, every one being at liberty, in such points, to follow his own convictions of what was right, and bound to leave his brother to do the same, since any other course would lead to sin and strife. 'To his own master,' said St Paul, 'every one standeth or falleth.' Christ is the only Lord of conscience, and the usurpation of his throne in the Church, by an authoritative decision in things which he has left indifferent, is one characteristic of the grand apostasy, personified as 'the man of sin,' who '*commanded* to abstain from meats.'" [1]

Lord Herbert.—Your position, as I understand it, is this:—There are certain things "left indifferent" by Christ, the only Lord of conscience, such as "the *meats prohibited* in the Mosaic law." These meats, you say, were not left indifferent to the Jews before the time of Christ, but since then they are left indifferent to Christians. These two remarks occur to me. First, it is not only "in such points," but in *all* points, that "every one is at liberty to follow his own convictions, and bound to leave his brother to do the same;" and therefore you should leave me, and our friend beside me, to follow our own convictions, just as you leave your brother Protestants to do. Secondly, if the external diversities of the Protestant Church involve such points only as are "left indifferent" by Christ, how can they legitimately affect the conscience?

[1] Schism, pp. 70, 71.

Melancthon.—They legitimately affect the consciences of those on whom they are imposed as terms of communion; for thus what is indifferent in itself is erroneously obtruded as if it were essential. "Calamy shews that the Nonconformists not only felt insuperable conscientious objections to many things that were enjoined, but also to *the principle* of imposing what Christ had not instituted; as 'they thought making it necessary, is a manifest encroachment on the kingly power of our Saviour; as it is making new terms of communion, in which they durst not concur.'" [1]

Lord Herbert.—Very well. The diversities between one Protestant denomination and others are things indifferent, or they are not. If they are not, but essential, then Protestants contradict and oppose each other on the very essentials of religion. If these diversities be indeed things indifferent, then no two separate denominations can be organized except on "*the principle* of imposing what Christ has not instituted." For all the denominations have the same "terms of communion," or they have not. So many as have *the same* terms of communion, have no occasion or pretext whatever to continue separate from each other. And, therefore, there cannot by any possibility be two distinct denominations, or two separate churches, without the one or the other "making *new* terms of communion."

Bellarmine.—The argument is conclusive. Hence, the charge of spiritual despotism, so freely launched against us by the protesters, rebounds upon every one of their numberless and almost nameless sects, except the one, if such

[1] Schism, p. 360, 361.

can be found, in whose terms of communion there is nothing *new*.

Melancthon.—"All parties have erred, more or less, in thus rendering *imperative* the 'commandments of men.' Even granting that the traditionary evidence for any supposed apostolic usage may be so overpowering *to me*, that although I am obliged to admit that it is not actually found in the Scriptures, I can still conscientiously adopt it for myself, as virtually of divine authority; granting that I cannot sympathise with my brother Christian in his scruples,—that they seem to me to arise from prejudice, or possibly from some obtuseness of intellect which renders him less alive to the force of evidence; shall I, even then, build compulsory *uniformity* on this ground, the ground of my own private conviction? Shall I make his yielding *his* opinion to me an essential to my visible oneness with him in Christ?"[1]

Lord Herbert.—This argument is of equal force against separate denominations, as it is favourable to Christian fellowship. Every separate denomination builds compulsory uniformity (compulsory in a spiritual sense, which is the worst sense), on the ground of the private conviction of its adherents. If, then, the reasoning be sound, it goes to the overthrow of existing denominations. But is it sound? What ground have you for believing in Christianity but your "own private conviction?" Do you not make my yielding *my* opinion to you an essential to our mutual visible oneness? If your private conviction may mislead you in one thing, "in conscientiously adopting for yourself, as virtually of divine authority," what is perhaps

[1] Schism, pp. 79, 80.

not precisely of divine authority, then may it not mislead you in a second or a third thing? Besides, what you "conscientiously adopt for yourself, as virtually of divine authority," cannot be a matter of "indifference" *to you.*

Bellarmine.—It thus appears that heretics have not an inch of ground which they can make good as theirs. In practice they act on the very principles which they condemn in us; for in excluding each other from their communion, they arrogate the power of Christ, and of Christ's vicar upon earth. In theory they espouse the subtlest form of infidelity; for while they have nothing to fall back upon but "private judgment," this private judgment is ever and anon treated as a broken reed.

Theophilus.—If by things "indifferent" be meant matters on which no decision is given in the Word of God, it is plain, that the conflicting sentiments and denominational controversies of the Protestant Churches do not refer to such matters. The very admission that they do refer to matters undecided in Scripture is at least fatal to our separate organizations.

Those things which are alleged to be "indifferent," are so only in a limited degree. For example, eating meats offered to idols is declared by the Apostle to be lawful. The inspired author did not leave the controversy *unsettled*, while he exhorted the disputants to charity and forbearance.[1] There is, then, a right and a wrong in many things usually adduced as *indifferent.* Besides, no action of any man is indifferent to the man himself. For in performing the action, he believes it to be right, or he does not. If he does not believe an action to be right, he

[1] Rom. xiv. 14, 20; 1 Tim. iv. 4.

ought not to perform it; inasmuch as "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." If a man believes his action to be right, while it is wrong, he incurs indirect guilt; it is "a sin of ignorance."

It is our conviction that no action is in itself entirely destitute of the ethical element. There is a relation between the action done and the constitution of the being performing it, which determines it to be proper or improper. Eating meats offered to idols, and partaking now of the flesh of animals prohibited to the Jews of old, are in themselves perfectly legitimate and becoming. But an action may be right or proper without being obligatory. The agent's view of his own doing brings another and more powerful ethical element into every human action. To plead, therefore, in regard to any religious question, that it respects a "thing indifferent," in the proper and distinct meaning of that word, is contrary to the first principles of morals and religion. Besides, if this plea were actually true in regard to the matters which give occasion to the existence of our various denominations, it could not be received in their defence; it is utterly subversive of these denominations.

Melancthon.—"Where do we find, in the precepts of Christ or his apostles, anything which condemns diversities in modes and customs, not affecting the substantial elements of the Christian character? Can the passage be produced? Where do the apostles authorise us to consider the want of outward uniformity as an *offence?*"[1]

Lord Herbert.—When you shall tell me what *are* "the substantial elements of the Christian character," it will be

[1] Schism, p. 404.

time enough to answer your first question. And as to your last inquiry, do you really require me to point to passages in your New Testament to convince you, that the external separation of Christians from each other, and the formation of distinct communion tables, mutually exclusive, is an *offence?* You have yourself admitted this, even though, in the admission, you endeavour to soften it down, when you say, "it is a mark of infirmity,—of imperfect apprehension of truth,—that it is undesirable?" [1]

Melancthon.—Granting, then, that when we use the words "indifferent," and "non-essential," we do not employ them in their extreme meaning, we shall rest the defence of denominationalism on the distinction between what is more important and what is less important. "Even if it could be indirectly *proved* from reasoning on Scripture that, on some point not affecting Christian morals, in which all agree, our brother were in error, is it not a *greater error* to number him, on this account, among the notoriously wicked; to treat him avowedly as a 'heathen man and a publican,' and to make no distinction between him and an apostate? 'Why beholdest thou the mote in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?' The schismatical spirit would act on the principle of the laws of Draco, making no difference between the highest crimes and the slightest misdemeanours." [2]

Lord Herbert.—I am at a loss to perceive whether this argument be for or against you. You employ it to convict those who, having formed or joined a distinct denomination, reserve their sympathies for those who are within

[1] Schism, p. 302. [2] Ib. p. 404.

it. Admitting that such parties are wrong, they are more consistent than you are. They, in their profession of purity, would exclude both high crimes and slight misdemeanours, because both are worthy of exclusion,—an opinion which does not in itself by any means support the inference which you draw from it, that both are culpable in *an equal degree*. Now, you maintain that you may consistently support one denomination without unchristianizing another denomination, while you have also maintained that the Church should be free to all Christians, without exception,—which, in plain words, just means, that you can treat the same individual, "avowedly," and in the same breath, both as a "brother" and as "a heathen man and a publican." In supporting your own denomination, *whose terms of communion exclude him*, you treat him as "a heathen man and a publican." In calling him a Christian, you *regard him as a "brother in Christ."*

Bellarmine.—You spoke of "Christian morals, in which all agree." This is only an evasion; for it is notorious that there are several momentous points of "Christian morals," in which Protestants are far indeed from being agreed. When the question is what we are now considering, namely, how to distinguish between the more important and the less important, or the matters in which Christians must agree, and those in which they may differ, any vague assertion, such as the above, is surely out of place. But the controversy will terminate, if you will condescend to draw the line between high crimes and slight misdemeanours.

Melancthon.—"We think it best to content ourselves with, and to persuade others unto, an *unity of character*,

and *mutual toleration,* seeing that God hath authorized no man to force all men to *unity of opinion.*"[1]

Lord Herbert.—But since there can be no "unity of character" without "unity of opinion," *to some extent at least,* we wish to know what that extent is, or how we are to discover and determine it?

Bellarmine.—If God does not force men to receive certain opinions, he assuredly punishes those who refuse to receive them. Let Protestants say at once that *heresy* is to be *tolerated,* because it does not infringe the unity of Christian character, or tell the world where heresy ends, and where mutual toleration begins. Then, it would follow that all heretical denominations should be regarded as unchristian, or, as they might designate them, antichristian; and hence also all denominations not tainted with heresy should be immediately merged in one.

Melancthon.—"Much as the separations that have taken place among orthodox Christians have, unhappily, been blended with strife and faction, it will scarcely be contended that a breach of charity must *necessarily* arise from their differences of opinion. If the all-wise Head of the Church has been pleased to leave many points so treated of in the New Testament, as that men may be genuine, and even intelligent Christians, and yet not view those points in the same light; and if some may be sincere in adopting forms and modes which others are equally sincere in declining, then considerable diversity of practice, in this respect, may surely consist, as in the case of the Jewish and Gentile converts, not only with fidelity to Christ, but also with charity to 'the brethren.' And if there be no

[1] Schism, p. 279.

schism in the diversity itself, there needs be none in the name which designates it, provided this name be not assumed in a party spirit." [1]

Lord Herbert.—Where there is no schism, there is not *necessarily* a breach of charity. But the question still remains, whether or not there is both schism and a breach of charity in those "differences of opinion," which form the occasion or cause or assigned reason for the existence of separate and distinct denominations of Christians? It is of no use to plead that these differences refer to points which "genuine, and even intelligent Christians" do not view in the same light, unless you assume the principle that no genuine and intelligent Christian can by possibility incur the guilt of schism. And even though you did assume this principle, it would not extricate you from your present difficulty; it would only bring you into this monotonous circle; where there are none but intelligent and genuine Christians, there is no schism, and where there is schism, there are some who are not genuine and intelligent Christians.

Bellarmine.—We have the same circle in another form, when it is said, that "among orthodox Christians," schism, or a breach of charity, does not "necessarily arise from their differences of opinion." Orthodoxy is here limited by these differences of opinion; and to explain the one by the other, while neither is separately defined, may be very convenient, but is not very fair or profitable. The diversity of practice, in the case of the Jewish and Gentile converts in the primitive age, to which reference has been made, did not lead to ecclesiastical separations similar to

[1] Schism, pp. 301, 302.

modern denominationalism. The assertion that "some may be sincere in adopting forms and modes, which others are equally sincere in declining," savours strongly of infidelity, without helping your argument. It certainly is a sceptical axiom, as was formerly proved, to maintain that a man may be sincere in error. Besides, if you adopt forms and modes which another Christian equally sincere as yourself cannot adopt, and thereby exclude him from your communion, you must confess yourself a schismatic. Thus you yourself have reasoned,—"if a church, supposed to want nothing necessary, require me to profess against my conscience that I believe some error, though never so small and innocent, which I do not believe, and will not allow me her communion but upon this condition, in this case the church, for requiring this condition, is schismatical, and not I, for separating from the church."[1]

Melancthon.—Notwithstanding all that can be said, charity is the chief requisite. "Should even *essential truth* be the object, unless the truth be pleaded for, or promoted, '*in love*,' zeal for it is no longer a Christian virtue, but a mere gust of passion, or the efflux of bigotry or party feeling."[2] "Mistaken zeal may also sacrifice the peace of the Church, by dignifying with the name of important truth, things indifferent, or doubtful, or at least not essential. Or zeal may be expended on matters which involve a perversion of the simplicity of the gospel, and which tend to pain and to repel all sober minds."[3]

Lord Herbert.—The question before us is still unanswered. But let us assume the distinction which you take

[1] Chillingworth, quoted in Schism, p. 278.

[2] Schism, p. 396. [3] Ib. p. 397.

for granted without proving or explaining, and apply it to your party segregations. If your sects differ from each other on essentials, then Protestants have shown too much "love" for each other's denominations, or too little love towards *us*. If your sects are based on "things indifferent, or doubtful, or at least not essential," then, in constructing and continuing these sects, you are "dignifying" these non-essentials "with the name of important truth."

Bellarmine.—The fairness of the last inference is clearly confirmed by the following words:—"Though there be such agreement in the main as to doctrine, that a ground exists for a large degree of Christian union, schisms and divisions may be produced by THE IMPOSITION OF TERMS OF COMMUNION, WHICH ARE NOT PRESCRIBED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, AS CONDITIONS OF SALVATION. It is clear that the plea on which the Apostle Paul founded his exhortations to the Romans, respecting mutual toleration between the Jewish and Gentile converts, was, that each was accepted of God on the broad principles of the gospel: for '*God hath received him.*' In his epistle to the Philippian Christians, also, the apostle assumes, that although they were so far '*perfect*,' as to have rightly received all fundamental truth, there might still be *some* things in respect to which diversity of opinion existed. The legitimate method of obtaining a nearer coincidence of views on these subordinate points, was devoutly to seek the Divine guidance. In the meantime, they were to be cordially united in the ordinances and the practice of the gospel, up to the last limit which conscience would allow. 'Let us, therefore, as many as be *perfect*, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise (differently) minded, God shall re-

veal even this unto you. Nevertheless, *whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.*'—(Phil. iii. 15, 16)." [1] Now it is not alleged in this statement, that the apostle sanctions those who hold " diversity of opinion " " on these subordinate points," to form or support distinct denominations. To do so is wholly contrary to the apostle's views, and is evidently condemned by the language of the author who has just been quoted. For two denominations cannot continue in separate existence without one or other of them " imposing terms of communion which are not prescribed in the New Testament." And whenever this is done, subordinate topics, to use your own language, are dignified as if they were fundamental.

Melancthon.—You have forgotten or overlooked a portion of the passage quoted, namely, " they were to be cordially united in the ordinances and the practice of the gospel, *up to the last limit which conscience would allow.*"

Lord Herbert.—Protestants do, indeed, talk of the limit which conscience sets to their union. But does Paul, or any other of those whom you look up to as inspired, speak of this limit, or define it? Certainly there is nothing said about it in the verses alluded to from the Epistle to the Philippians. On the contrary, Paul's exhortation is based upon the supposition that there is no such limit; when he says, " if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall *reveal even this* unto you."

Bellarmine.—It is now made manifest, that Protestants are baffled in defending or excusing their variegated deno-

[1] Schism, pp. 358, 359.

minationalism, whether they urge the claims of conscience, or plead the distinction between essentials and non-essentials. When driven from one of these arguments to resort quietly to the other, as is constantly done, is a patent and unworthy subterfuge.

Theophilus.—It appears from what has been advanced, that we have not as yet found a clear and valid distinction between essentials and non-essentials, or between high crimes and slight misdemeanours, or between the more and the less important—*such as* may be available to secure and vindicate the proper union of Christians while sanctioning their distinct organizations. This last mode of stating the distinction as between what is more and less important or weighty, appears to be the only correct mode, and the one to which all the others are fairly reduced in the course of discussion. But it is the one most rarely resorted to, for it is obviously least available in the argument, being in appearance, as well as in reality, loose and unsatisfactory for that purpose. In whatever way, however, this distinction is regarded or expressed, it is of no force to palliate denominationalism but by the sacrifice of Christian union.

Melancthon.—Quite the reverse. For different organizations leave room for diversity of sentiment; and if these are supported by their respective members in a Christian spirit, visible union may be secured. It is not separation that is evil, but alienation of heart. "How can it be shown, that by maintaining estrangement of feeling and behaviour towards Christians of another name, 'we are but bearing a becoming testimony against what is wrong.' He who cherishes this estrangement ought surely to have

fully convinced himself, from the word of God, that these Christians are living in serious error of doctrine or practice:—but does their general spirit and character bear out the charge? Even if *he* be right in his distinguishing peculiarities, (and may he not be wrong?) are not *their* peculiarities rather infirmities than heinous sins?" [1]

Lord Herbert.—So you are back to the old oscillation—of two opposing sentiments no one knows which is right!

Theophilus.—Is it not equally true respecting the maintenance of open separation, as "of estrangement of feeling and behaviour," that we are justified in neither, till we have fully convinced ourselves, from the word of God, that the parties from whom we separate, or are estranged, "are living in serious error of doctrine or practice?" Is it necessary to prove that nothing can vindicate an open separation, which would not also occasion such an estrangement? Or will the fact be questioned, that our existing system of denominations actually *necessitates* a certain amount of "estrangement of feeling and behaviour" among Christians, while it occasions and fosters a great deal more? Denominationalism cannot hold up its head for a moment, if it abandon the plea of "bearing a becoming testimony against what is wrong." And the breast, in which an estrangement of feeling and behaviour towards those who do *what is wrong*, does not arise, is not regulated by the principles of the New Testament.

Exclusion from the visible Church can never be held as equivalent to exclusion from heaven at last. If any man's peculiarities be mere "infirmities," they do not call for ecclesiastical discipline, nor for a separate denomination.

[1] Schism, p. 408.

But if they involve "a serious error of doctrine or practice," the individual cannot, in the very nature of things, be regarded and treated in all respects as a brother, even though he be a brother, but should be excluded from all Christian communion till he abandon his error. He is not to be transhipped to another denomination of God's people, but debarred from the fellowship of *all* the faithful. If what is called a wrong be only an "infirmity," and not a "heinous sin"—if a man be "a weak brother," surely it were wiser and more kindly to draw him more closely to your bosom, and avoid the least appearance of alienation, than to banish him to the precincts of another denomination as a sort of semi-penal settlement.

Different denominations of Christians cannot exist, as has been remarked, without the peculiarities of each being virtually, if not formally, imposed as terms of communion. Now "the real question at issue—the momentous principle at stake—is, whether God or man is to be the lord of conscience? Are the things imposed 'indifferent,'" or non-essential or less important? "Then, what man, or what body of men, has a right to make them *essential*, by declaring them indispensable terms of communion?"[1] It is not, therefore, "the violent schismatic" *alone*, of whom it is true that he "presumes to be arbiter of all truth." For every denominationalist, who contends for the continuance of his own sect, while at the same time he allows that its peculiarities are non-essential, or not expressly commanded in Scripture, is, not only virtually, but openly "assuming the right to *pronounce* where revelation is silent—to give law to conscience, where apostles would

[1] Schism, p. 360.

have left it (and did leave it) free, to condemn, where angels might applaud."[1]

You can scarcely, perhaps, inflict upon yourself or your brother Christian a greater spiritual wrong, than in unwarrantably withholding from him your fullest religious sympathy and communion. Hence no more powerful *constraint* can be exercised over the mind of an intelligent and genuine believer, than the fear of justly forfeiting the unfettered and cordial fellowship of his brethren. And no one thinks of denying that the prevailing polity of sectarianism most seriously limits the expansion, and chills most ominously the warmth, of Christian affection in the community. That so many professing disciples of Him, who loved us, and gave Himself for us, can continue to support a system by which such a large portion of the rich blessings of Christianity and the noblest enjoyments of human nature is restricted and lost, while they seem almost unconscious and unconcerned about this heavy deprivation, is surely a sad symptom of spiritual relaxation and decrepitude.

It is plainly indisputable that if any professing brother be entangled in wrong-doing or heinous sin, in a serious error of doctrine or practice, he ought to be cut off from the fellowship of the Church—he is to be regarded by those who continue faithful *as* a heathen man and a publican. If he be indeed a genuine Christian, this treatment will generally have the effect, as it is intended to have, of working repentance in his mind, which will lead to his restoration, and thus the visible unity of the Church be preserved uninjured. But if he do not return to the

[1] Schism, p. 442.

bosom of the Church, and gather others around him to form a new society, its character will depend on the quality of the errors in which it is involved. We believe in the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines. But instead of building the union of the Church on this distinction, which would require its most accurate and rigid enunciation, we apply it to discriminate a *heretical* from a *schismatical* church, in which case no interest of practical value is made to be dependent upon its precise and unerring application.

The deliberate and avowed denial of fundamental truth involves the guilt of heresy; the formal and public rejection of truth that is not fundamental implies the guilt of schism. An honest mind will be anxious to avoid both sorts of sin, and need not be too curious to know where the one begins and where the other ends. It is vastly otherwise to admit that any truth or duty whatever is non-essential or indifferent. If we speak of truth *as truth*, or of duty *as duty*,—that is, if we speak of them in their catholic relations to all intelligent and responsible beings, then beyond doubt all truth and all duty are equally necessary and essential. There cannot, indeed, be different degrees of the essential or the necessary. To affirm that any precept of the Most High is non-essential, or unnecessary, or indifferent to those on whom it is enjoined, is an open avowal of unqualified rebellion. In a similar way all truth is easily shown to be in itself essential. To suppose that an intelligent being is at liberty to disregard or set aside any truth whatever—that he may trample on the smallest truth and incur no penalty, is to prepare a fissure in the tree of knowledge and place in it the wedge of scepticism.

There are, doubtless, particular truths and duties which may be more or less important and urgent to certain parties at special times. But then it is always difficult to appreciate *correctly* the distinction between a less and a greater significance or value, which depends upon a considerable number of various circumstances, and for the measurement of which no sliding scale has been devised. The difference between what is more and less important in Christian duty and doctrine depends so entirely, upon the character and circumstances of the persons whose case may be under consideration, that it can never be reduced to a general formula or principle which shall remain unchanged, and be always applicable to the ever-varying events of human society.

In illustration of our remarks, we may refer to the progressive character of Christianity as it is developed among men, both socially and individually. It is required of every Christian that he grow in grace and increase in knowledge; while theology as a science has certainly made some advances during the last eighteen centuries. We are all looking for a revival of religion in the Church, as a prelude to its victories in the world. This revival will include both a clearer and a fuller hold of Christian truth, as every one but the veriest enthusiast will admit. Progress, then, is an essential element of the gospel, as it is manifested in the beliefs of its disciples. Improvement and advancement are necessary characteristics of *subjective* Christianity. It is, therefore, impossible to find, and perilous to fancy, a sharp and well-defined line of separation in the actual or attainable stock of knowledge belonging to Christian people, which divides essential

from non-essential duty, or necessary from indifferent truth.

But, it will be said, Is not the knowledge of Christ Jesus essential to a sinner in an emphatic sense, in which nothing else can be said to be essential or necessary? In reply, it is needful to inquire, what is meant by the knowledge of Christ? Is it *that amount* of knowledge which was possessed by Enoch, or by Abraham, or by Zaccheus, or by Luther? In each of these cases the knowledge of Christ the Saviour was certainly different in amount.

What we are disposed to regard as essential and indispensable to every man's salvation may be stated thus: that he use with all assiduity and candour every means that may be within his reach to acquire knowledge respecting the character and laws of God his Maker and Christ his Redeemer, and that he earnestly seek the help of his Father in heaven to act up to the knowledge which he possesses. There is no doubt a peculiar and precious blessing attached to a *knowledge and belief* of the gospel —a blessing which cannot be attained except through that knowledge and belief, and which is too frequently missed by professing Christians, inasmuch as they fail to make a proper use of their knowledge of the Saviour,—even the unspeakable blessing of a *present* salvation, the enjoyment of *peace with God.*

Melancthon.—"From Rom. xiv. we learn that in things indifferent Christians should not condemn each other."[1] "Let us ask ourselves if, in the church to which we belong, Christian union is built on evangelical doctrines

[1] Union, p. 28.

alone; and, if it be not, let us remember that, in proportion as we increase the number of requisites to communion, we multiply the occasions of dissension and division. *That* union is not likely to be firm and lasting, the centre of which is a trifle, or which even includes trifles. While the more we reduce the number of those things which the gospel warrants us to regard as essential to Christianity, the more attractive and binding the centre of our unity, the larger the sphere of our Christian charity, and the greater the number of Christians and of Christian churches comprehended and embraced in our views of the brotherhood." [1]

Bellarmine.—When did the holy Catholic Church ever lay claim to such a *dispensing* power, or such a stretch of *indulgence,* as that which you have now challenged for every petty Protestant denomination: a power to "*reduce the number of those things which the gospel warrants us to regard as essential to Christianity!*"

Lord Herbert.—Is every thing which does not form an *evangelical doctrine* "a trifle?" If not, how do you dispose of those things which lie midway between trifles and evangelical doctrines?

Melancthon.—"Let us aim to acquire clear and enlarged views of the great central truths of religion, that every thing else may appear comparatively trivial, and that our differences respecting them may become trivial also." [2]

Lord Herbert.—"That every thing else may *appear comparatively* trivial;" very guarded language indeed. But guarded though it be, it is inconsistent with other of

[1] Union, p. 244. [2] Ib. p. 247.

your statements, such as these following. "If the Bible be a revelation from God, its authority, on every subject to which it relates, must be regarded as paramount."[1] Does the Bible relate to no subject but "the great central truths of religion?" Again, "we must know that there is *nihil minimum—nothing little* in religion."[2]

Bellarmine.—Here, then, Protestants are convicted of a double inconsistency, when they assert that their denominational differences refer to matters trivial or indifferent. The assertion is inconsistent, as has just been pointed out, with their avowed principles respecting the supreme authority of the Bible, and the native importance of every religious question. Again, the assertion is self-condemnatory. To use their own words and arguments: "True it is that all churches must have *some* terms of communion; but that any society assuming the name of a church, should establish conditions, distinct from those enjoined by Christ and his apostles, is, one would think, sufficiently presumptuous."[3] And what Protestant denomination is there that does not act thus presumptuously? "That these terms should consist, partly, of things which the imposers themselves acknowledge to be 'indifferent and insignificant,' seems to add folly to presumption."[4] And what denomination of Protestants does not to presumption add this folly? "But that these insignificant things should be enforced, on men who conscientiously object to them, on pain of temporal ruin, seems to be an act conceived in the spirit of pure intolerance."[5]

[1] Union, p. 218. [2] Union, p. 136. [3] Union, p. 136.
[4] Ib. p. 136. [5] Ib. p. 136.

Melancthon.—Take that last remark home to your own *holy* church. We enforce nothing "*on pain of temporal ruin.*"

Bellarmine.—But you do *worse;* you enforce,—that is, there is not a single denomination that does not enforce, or attempt to enforce,—such things as you have now been describing as insignificant or indifferent trifles, on pain of *spiritual loss and damage*, if not ruin. Bear with me while I finish my quotation: "The inflicting spiritual censures upon them that cannot do so much violence to their understanding as to obey, is ineffectual and unjust."[1] "The less they (your differences) are, the greater the sin to make them necessary, to hang so great things upon them, break the Church's peace and unity by them, and of them to make a new gospel, new terms of life and death, a new way to heaven."[2] What Protestant sect does not, judging them by commonly received principles, perpetrate this folly and incur this guilt? Supporting a denomination whose terms of communion include something unscriptural, or something trifling, "is in effect to say, If you will not take Christianity with these additions of ours, you shall not be Christians; you shall have no Christian ordinances, no Christian worship: we will, as far as in us is, exclude you from heaven itself, and all means of salvation. And upon the same ground on which they may be excluded one communion by such arbitrary measures, they may be excluded another also, and be received nowhere. And if the terms of these communions differ, they all exclude one another; and hence so many churches, so many christendoms. If this be sinful, it is a sin of the

[1] Bishop Taylor, quoted, ib. ib. [2] Howe, quoted, ib. ib.

deepest die. And if the Holy Scriptures speak with such severity, as we know they do, of the altering of *man's* landmarks, what may we think of altering God's!"[1]

Melancthon.—"Although the first separatists from a church may have been schismatical, those who continue the separation may not be so. 'They who alter, without necessary cause, the present government of any state, civil or ecclesiastical, do commit a great fault; yet *they* may be innocent who continue this alteration . . . . when continuance of time hath once settled it.' *They* may perpetuate it conscientiously and amicably, so as to endear themselves to the community left, and to identify themselves with the universal Church."[2]

Lord Herbert.—This reasoning is legitimate only on the supposition, that the guilt of schism in the first separation lay, not at all in the act of separation, but entirely and solely in the manner of effecting it. Which is the same thing as saying, that the crime of murder has nothing whatever to do with the taking of a man's life, but consists solely and entirely in the use of poison, or daggers, or some other lethal instrumentality.

Bellarmine.—Let the author quoted from answer himself. "Ever let us remember that the Christian Church, in its scriptural state, contains nothing but pure and catholic principles of all-embracing love. The exclusive spirit, therefore, is the schismatic spirit; and he who prescribes a term of communion with it of his own devising—however simple in itself, and plausible in its appearance—is putting a price on the bread of life, and throwing a bar across the entrance to a city of refuge; and they who continue that

[1] Howe, quoted in Union, p. 137. [2] Ib. p. 100.

term share his responsibility, and are chargeable with perpetuating the schism of intolerance."[1] If this statement be correct, it is plain that there is only one Church, or one denomination, that has not terms of communion of its own devising. There *cannot* be more than one such denomination. And if the guilt be the same to *continue* and *perpetuate* these humanly devised terms of communion, as to *make* them, then is it as manifest as light itself, that the great and vastly preponderating majority of Protestants are "putting a price on the bread of life. and throwing a bar across the entrance to a city of refuge."

Theophilus.—It thus appears, that the plea so often resorted to about things indifferent, is of no avail to defend or save our modern denominationalism. If our argument be not invalid, no truth can with propriety be regarded as unnecessary or unessential. Hence Christian union can be effected and consolidated only by a positive agreement in several truths, and schism can be avoided only by avoiding contradiction on any truth whatever. If, then, any matter be really a trifle, a point of indifference, a question of probabilities, it is surely the height of extravagance to constitute it the characteristic feature of a separate denomination of Christians. *If our denominational differences be trivial, denominationalism is without even a plausible excuse; if they be important, they are so many schisms in the Church, the body of Christ.*

[1] Union, p. 139.

III.—*Love, and the Imperfection of the Human Mind.*

Melancthon.—"The splendid hope which some entertain, that Christianity will ultimately unite the whole Church in every article of faith and practice, in inward sentiment as well as outward form, is only, it is to be feared, a visionary prospect; though the fact that the Gospel should have awakened such an expectation, proclaims aloud its conciliatory spirit. There is, however, a union which its subjects pray for, and its promises secure, a union of affection, which, 'linking heart to heart, shall leave the judgment free, and, out of the varying tones of many minds, shall form one harmonious whole.'" [1]

Lord Herbert.—I shall thank you to reconcile these statements with the following, from the same pen:—"Most freely do we admit that nothing connected with religion is unimportant, or absolutely indifferent; and that, important as the harmony and peace of the Church may be, the interests of truth and holiness are still more so: partly, because they are the only foundation on which the temple of peace can be built. And most earnestly do we deprecate that latitudinarian indifference which would attempt reconciliation at the expense of truth, as evil in its origin, and highly dangerous in its tendency. The principles of revelation are immortal and immutable; and he who fancies he has a dispensing power here, or who acts as if he had, by making a single concession to an object or a party at the expense of truth, from that moment writes

[1] Union, p. 110.

himself traitor to her throne, and becomes disqualified for her service."[1]

Bellarmine.—So far as I can understand language, the one passage gives a clear and decided pre-eminence and power to "love," or "affection," in accomplishing union; while the other passage as decidedly and unequivocally subordinates this love or affection to intelligence and truth.

Melancthon.—"'I,' said Baxter,—and the sentiment was worthy the inspired pen of the seraphic John,—'I can as willingly be a martyr for *love* as for any article of the creed.'"[2]

Lord Herbert.—This sentiment will be a frequent source of anguish to the individual, who is conscious to himself of being unable to distinguish between those "articles of faith and practice," on which Christian union is based, and those on which it has no dependence. For while he is seeking "a union of affection, which, linking heart to heart, leaves the judgment free, and, out of the varying tones of many minds, forms one harmonious whole," he will, at the very same time, be filled with trembling, lest in so doing he practise that "latitudinarian indifference which would attempt reconciliation at the expense of truth."

Bellarmine.—Moreover, if "the appointed channel in which religion flows is through the understanding, to the heart,"[3] I must *know whom* I am to love, and *what* I am to love, before I can become an intelligent or praise-worthy martyr even to *love*.

Melancthon.—"Having erected our standard of union, we must not expect that any one party will concede more

[1] Union, pp. 207, 208. [2] Ib. 209. [3] Ib. p. 179.

than ourselves, in order to meet it. If, in order to reach it, sacrifices are necessary, these sacrifices must be mutual. We must be prepared to give as much as we ask; and, instead of waiting till others move, we must ourselves set the example of concession, in the hope of being followed. The glory of *leading* here is, in some respects, greater than that of the martyr's crown." [1]

Lord Herbert.—The standard of union which you have been setting up is too indistinct in its colours, and too indefinite in its watchword, to rally around it earnest and intelligent men. Besides, what sacrifices and concessions, let me ask, do you expect each other to make?

Bellarmine.—The question is most apposite, since we were so recently told, that "he who makes a single concession at the expense of truth, from that moment writes himself traitor to her throne, and becomes disqualified for her service."

Melancthon.—"Let it be observed,—a truth which we have often repeated already, that we do not ask any one to sacrifice his opinions, but only his unchristian bigotry." [2]

Lord Herbert.—Pray, what merit is there in such a concession, or what glory in such a sacrifice? Besides, if you do not ask Christians to sacrifice any of their present opinions, how, in the ample range of possibility, can Christian union ever be effected?

Melancthon.—"We do not ask the Independent to become an Episcopalian, nor the Episcopalian to become an Independent. We do not ask the Calvinist to change sides with the Arminian, nor the Baptist with the Paedo-bap-

[1] Union, p. 215. [2] Ib. p. 208.

tist; but only to exchange the visible expressions of that love which they ought mutually to cherish as heirs together of the grace of life." [1]

Bellarmine.—But it is manifest as the brightness of noonday, that if the Indpendent, the Calvinist, and the Baptist, each maintains that his peculiar views are true and obligatory, being enjoined in the divine oracle, and if the Episcopalian, the Arminian, and the Pædo-baptist, each maintains also the same respecting his peculiar views, one of the parties in each dispute (if not both) is misinterpreting the word of God, and "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." By thus "rejecting the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition," ye are also ruthlessly and endlessly rending the Church, the body of Christ Jesus.

Melancthon.—All the world sees the folly of so acting, as in effect to say, "The grand doctrines of salvation are nothing as a basis of Christian union, unless their reception be accompanied by certain shades of opinion which I myself have adopted." [2] "The truth as it is in Jesus is not to be reduced to a level with truth as it is in a party." [3] "By indulging attachment to particular shades of opinion, at the expense of all that large portion of the Bible which inculcates love to the brethren, we are sacrificing truth." [4] It is absurd to "defend some little angle or ornament in the temple of truth at the expense of one of the pillars." [5]

Lord Herbert.—What more reasonable, then, or necessary, than our reiterated request, which has never yet

[1] Union, p. 208. [2] Ib. p. 208. [3] Ib. p. 209.
[4] Union, p. 209. [5] Ib. p. 209.

been met, to know how to distinguish between the "grand doctrines of salvation" and "certain shades of opinion," between "the truth as it is in Jesus" and "the truth as it is in a party," between "the angles and ornaments" and "the pillars" of the temple of truth.

Bellarmine. — Besides, these "particular shades of opinion," the denominational peculiarities recently specified, and such like, are either a portion of the truth, the angles and ornaments of the temple, or they are not. If they do not belong at all to the temple of truth,— if "the truth as it is in a party" be only a counterfeit or spurious truth, then why should the world have been made to ring with the controversies that have risen about these non-truths,—these trifles; and why should the Church have been rent by them so frequently and so grievously?

Lord Herbert.—And if these "particular shades of opinion" be indeed "the angles and ornaments of the temple of truth," then are we reduced to the conclusion that the temple of truth is not in harmony with itself. An attempt to strengthen its foundations, or support its columns, disturbs its embellishments, and mars its beauty; or, on the other hand, an effort to retouch its decorations, or perfect its proportions, endangers its very existence!! If such be a Christian's ideal of the temple of truth, *we* may well ask, What is truth?

Theophilus.—The question may be more thoroughly sifted, if we have before our minds some of the evils entailed by want of love among Christians.

Melancthon.—Lack of charity, or intolerance, "still looks on the reformer who only ventures humbly to

suggest, and mildly to plead, as a schismatic and a foe." [1]

Lord Herbert.—I understand you to mean by "the reformer," a member of some particular denomination, who proposes some change in the principles or peculiarities of his denomination. Now, does not a man by the very act of joining a denomination pledge himself to all its peculiarities? And does not this pledge legitimately debar him from even proposing a reformation?

Bellarmine.—The case is most obvious. The specialities of the denomination have been honestly and diligently investigated, and conscientiously adopted by its members, we are told. If so, he who among themselves proposes an alteration is justly enough regarded as a sectary and an enemy. If the peculiarities of the denomination have not been in a sufficient and satisfactory manner examined and embraced, it ought never to have existed at all.

Theophilus.—Hence we perceive the obligation, that rests upon every denomination carefully to revise its present creed, and upon each individual to profess to believe only what he has thoroughly examined.

Melancthon.—"Intolerance still clings, if not with greater, at least with equal, tenacity to its own little devices and ceremonial additions, as to the great verities and ordinances of heaven; enforcing them all as of equal authority." [2]

Bellarmine.—And is not everything which God enjoins "of equal authority?" And if "these little devices and ceremonial additions" be not commanded, it is the

[1] Union, p. 126. [2] Ib. p. 126.

very height of intolerance to make them distinguishing marks of a denomination. And after constituting them such distinguishing marks, to speak of them thus disparagingly is a two-fold inconsistency.

Lord Herbert—And so long as different denominations do exist, Christians will *appear* to cling with equal tenacity to all their little devices and ceremonies, as to the great verities and ordinances of heaven; and thus their actions tend to shake what they call the foundations of truth, and consequently to contradict their professions.

Melancthon.—"Angels rejoice over one sinner that repenteth; but, in every religious community, the spirit of intolerance exults more in a proselyte from another church, than in a convert from the world."[1]

Lord Herbert.—In continuing to be separate from that other church, you profess your belief that it is a schismatic church. For if it be not a schismatic church, you are a schismatic in not uniting with it. And if that other church be involved in the guilt of schism, its extinction or extermination as a church is one great means to convert the world. The world, you believe, is to be brought over to Christianity when the Church becomes one; but its unity depends upon its purity,[2] and unless your church be *purer* than others, you have not the shadow of a reason for remaining separate. A conversion from the world to a schismatic church, therefore, is surely on these principles, a matter of less congratulation than an addition to the one true and pure Church, on which alone all the hopes of the world are suspended.

Theophilus.—From such reproaches and perplexities

[1] Union, p. 127. [2] Ib. p. 31.

we can escape, only by the realization of one undivided Christian Society.

Melancthon.—We never would assert that the Protestant "is quite invulnerable to the charge of sectarian assumption. As often as he dogmatises on the minute particulars of the apostolic pattern; denounces as unsound and unsafe whatever is not at the farthest possible remove from certain supposed errors; demands that every church on earth should be moulded according to *his* notions of the primitive model; and, in the pride of his heart, anticipates the universal extension of his favourite government unimproved and entire; he is making an additional remove from the enlarged and enlightened charity of the gospel, is an active agent of dissension, and is proving himself nearer of kin than he imagines to the intolerants of Oxford and of Rome."[1]

Bellarmine.—A national or dissenting denomination which does *not* "demand that every church on earth should be moulded according to *its* notions of the primitive model," is an obvious self-inconsistency. We respect ourselves in maintaining, that the distinguishing features of the holy Catholic Church are according to the primitive model, or are right in themselves, or are ordained of God, and so are fitted for "universal extension," "unimproved and entire." But when a Protestant contends for this and the other point, *as a distinguishing peculiarity of his denomination*, and at the same time admits that it is not fitted, or may not be fitted, "for universal extension," "unimproved and entire," he convicts himself of that very intolerant assumption which he charges upon us.

[1] Union, p. 148.

Lord Herbert.—And in attempting to defend his inconsistency under the shield of an "enlarged and enlightened charity," the shaft which he has often discharged against us recoils and wounds himself:—he plants charity on the ruins of truth.

Theophilus.—It certainly does require some attention and discrimination to fix the limits of truth and love, so as to keep them from mutually infringing the province of each other. The necessity of so doing is the more apparent, when we find, as in the present discussion, that the claims of truth are admitted to be paramount, and soon after made to succumb to charity. These limits will be fixed, when the question now before us is satisfactorily answered; nor does it appear how they can be fixed in any other way, but by answering that question, or showing what are the matters on which identity of opinion is necessary to Christian union, and what are the matters on which that identity of opinion may be dispensed with.

When this question is answered, *the* standard of union will be erected; for that standard is not the property of one party or another. To rally round that standard, the conflicting hosts of Christendom may have to act as if they were making mutual concessions and sacrifices; but this is not the full or most correct statement of the case. They do not so much make concessions to each other; but in rendering homage to the truth, abandon, each for himself, what the truth condemns. If one adopts what another has already espoused, he does so, not because it is his brother's, but because it *is right in itself.* Hence to speak of our being "prepared to give as much as we ask," is to

misunderstand the matter altogether, and to compare the investigation of eternal truth and the Divine law, to a bargaining about huckster's wares.

If it be said that Christian union does not require "any one to sacrifice his opinions," the difficulty immediately emerges, what sort of Christian union is that which admits of *contradictory* opinions on a hundred questions of revealed truth and practical importance? If a man's opinion be *erroneous*, is he not bound to sacrifice or abandon it? Who dare give him an indulgence to adhere to it? So long as there are *conflicting* opinions in the Christian community, there are of necessity also as many *erroneous* opinions; and if the Bible does not require every man to forsake all his errors, it cannot have come from the God of truth. Varying opinions on matters of probability are properly points of forbearance and concession, to be settled by the minority yielding to the majority. But such concession is morally wrong and religiously dangerous, when our opinions concern questions of truth or duty.

Applying this principle to the question of church government, it may be settled in one of two ways. If there be a form of church government *divinely instituted*, is it unreasonable to expect that Christians should come to an agreement as to what that form actually is? If there be no such form divinely appointed, then there is no sufficient reason to make church government a ground of denominational organization; but every open rupture and secret heart-burning on this topic may be prevented by mutual concession and long-suffering.

So also should the dispute be settled between Arminians and Calvinists. So far as these parties *contradict* each

other, one of them is undoubtedly in error; to cling to that error is to rend the Church of Christ. The Calvinist must cease to deny, directly or by implication, the free agency of man; and the Arminian must cease to deny, immediately or mediately, the fore-knowledge and sovereign supremacy of the Most High.

And as to infant baptism, if it be, indeed, a Divine ordinance, Christians should be able to agree about its Divine authority, and they will agree if they truly seek Divine guidance. If it be not divinely appointed, why may not every one follow his own view, without originating or supporting on this account separate denominations?

While the several parties now referred to continue to oppose each other as they have been doing, and to give perpetuity and publicity to their mutual conflict by separate organizations, it seems to us utterly impossible for them "to exchange the visible expression of that love which they ought mutually to cherish as heirs together of the grace of life." At least the visible expression of this love cannot be so full and cordial as it should be, nor so palpable as to produce an impression on the world, till these disputes are settled. We have ventured to suggest a plain and practical principle, by acting on which their adjustment may be effected.

Nothing is more dangerous, as has been often remarked, than representing, in a certain way, some doctrines and duties as more important or essential than others. We may not disparage or trifle with the least. But then there is a clear difference between what we know to be true, and what we regard as only probable. In probabilities there cannot be a contradiction. In certainties, how-

ever trivial *apparently*, there must be the absence of conflicting sentiments, if we would preserve the unity of the faith, and the harmony of Christian love, unbroken and undisturbed.

If, then, the peculiarities of a denomination be such matters only as are really true and obligatory upon all, they cease to be the peculiarities of a sect; they are, indeed, the enduring and unalterable features of the one true Church, separation from which is schism. Whenever there is positive harmony among men on the most patent and momentous points of faith and practice, and in regard to the remainder of these things all absence of conflict and opposition, there may well be exercised a mutual yielding generosity and conceding love, on questions which involve no manifest and weighty principle. A society of Christians organized in accordance with these suggestions is obviously adapted for "universal extension;" for the only improvement of which it is susceptible is a fuller development of that very truth, which it already holds fast, and holds forth. To affirm that no such organization is attainable, or to charge such an organization when it shall be attained with intolerance for claiming universal adoption, is not to plead the cause of a wise and magnanimous charity, or of long-suffering truth, but is to drive both truth and charity into one common hopeless wreck.

Melancthon.—All this sounds very well; but "let us consider the natural history and necessary imperfections of the human mind. How impotent is our reason, how dark our understanding, how wayward our passions, how deeply rooted our prejudices. How more than probable is it that no two individuals pass through precisely the

same process in reaching their religious conclusions—that early propensities, prescribed courses of study, domestic and local impressions, artificial habits of thought, physical temperament, future prospects, and the infinite complication of influences through which we pass, make it impossible for any two persons ever to see the same object from the same point of view, or through exactly the same medium, so that, in effect, they never see absolutely the same object. How more than probable is it that a *slight* change in our circumstances would have produced a *great* change in our opinions; and that if the judgment of any one is to be a standard to the world, there are thousands more eligible than ours. So that unless we can show that by some magic charm, or miraculous exemption, we have escaped the disturbing influences incident to humanity, and can claim perfection, we need the forbearance of our fellow-Christians; and the tenderness we need for ourselves, we shall feel bound to extend to others." [1]

Lord Herbert.—Why do you refuse to extend this tenderness to *us?* We only ask for ourselves at your hands that same "forbearance," which you have now claimed for each other. If your "reason" is "impotent," and your "understanding" "dark," and your "passions" "wayward," and your "prejudices" "deeply rooted," how do you know that Christianity is true? Should we not be as half-witted as yourselves, if we trusted the knowledge of such dark and impotent minds? If it be "impossible for any two persons ever to see the same object from the same point of view, or through exactly the same medium, so that, in effect, they never see absolutely the

[1] Union, pp. 239, 240.

same object," by what "magic charm" do you reach that "substantial oneness of faith," of which we hear so much, but which, like a shadow, is ever eluding our grasp?

Bellarmine.—If it be true that "a *slight* change in our circumstances" may produce "a *great* change in our opinions," and if it is only "by some magic charm, or miraculous exemption," that we can "escape the disturbing influences incident to humanity," then is your vaunted right of private judgment something worse than a mere myth of fairy-land; it is a mischievous deception.

Theophilus.—The depravity of human nature, and the validity of the human understanding, must both be held, without allowing the one to infringe upon or impair the other. By the latter is meant the power of the human reason, when honestly and diligently exercised on any particular subject, to avoid an erroneous judgment on that subject. The depravity of our nature is developed in such facts as these: the entire loss of any comfortable sense of the Divine favour, the erroneous beliefs of our education, the relaxed sensibility of conscience, the disorder of our affections, and the comparative weakness of volition. Without any help at all from the Holy Ghost, the purchase of Christ's death, the natural mind is so dim and dead as, perhaps, to be not even responsible. But, if so, every man must be regarded as receiving so much aid from the *common* operations of the Spirit, as to render him amenable to law.

In regard to the point more immediately in hand, we perfectly agree with the author to whom reference has been so frequently made, if he would only agree always

with himself. He says, "Among the many important reflections suggested, the following seem almost forced upon our attention:—1. That the additions which man has made, from time to time, to the ordinances of God, have been the most fruitful sources of agitation and quarrel. 2. That even these have not led to actual separation, until they have been authoritatively enforced, and made indispensable. 3. That neither the one nor the other could have taken place, if the authority of the Bible had been revered and regarded as paramount."[1] It seems all but self-evident, that if "*no additions were made to the ordinances of God*," no contradiction would arise among Christian men on religious topics. It is quite as evident, that if no party made such additions "indispensable," and all abstained from attempting "authoritatively to enforce" them, that there could be only one denomination. Nor is more needed for the accomplishment of such a happy and grand consummation, than practical deference to the authority of the Bible, by giving to every question a careful and conscientious examination.

We verily believe that a spirit of conciliation would of itself do as much towards the adjustment of disputed points, as the many treatises which they have ever called forth. Mutual explanation, carefully and courteously sought, and promptly and patiently given, would remove many a stumbling-block, and prove that many a difficulty, which has been deemed insuperable, is almost unfounded, or highly exaggerated. If the transcendently great objects of the Christian religion, such as the yearning tenderness of our Heavenly Father, the unutterable love of

[1] Union, p. 128.

His Son, our Saviour, the worth of a human soul, the woes of the lost, the bliss of the saved, were to engage more general attention, and diffuse their hallowed influence more effectually over the hearts of Christ's professing people, some of the points now contested, hotly and disastrously, would disappear, and be for ever forgotten. Others would immediately lose the heavy mists that had so long enshrouded them, and emerge into view, in bold relief, free from all indistinctness and ambiguity, bathed in the clear and serene atmosphere of truth. The remaining topics of controversy might be held in suspense, while Christians examined and prayed, and prayed and examined them, till the Spirit of Truth should descend to bless our examinations in answer to our prayers, by leading us into all truth.

IV.—*The Primitive Church.*

Melancthon.—But let us take the apostolic churches for our examples. "Faith and love are evidently the only bond which existed, or which could have existed among the Christians of the first churches. In the order of nature the object precedes the act—the truth to be believed precedes the act of believing it. But it was by simply believing the gospel—the doctrine of redemption through the atoning sacrifice of Christ—that the first Christians became eligible to form a church:—the object of their faith preceded their existence as a church, and was the condition and reason of their organization: while the mode of conducting their worship, the form of church

government, and every opinion independent of and subordinate to that great doctrine were, in the order of nature, subjects for subsequent consideration. As far indeed as these were prescribed by apostolic authority, they were to be received as imperative, because divinely inspired. But their very prescription supposed a church already in existence; or, at least, the existence of Christian men eligible to become a church. Now that which was sufficient to render *them* eligible for membership, and to bind *them* together as a church, must be still adequate for the same purposes."[1]

Lord Herbert.—There are two distinct questions suggested by these remarks, to both of which I should like to have an explicit answer. First, were there among the first Christians any contradictory and conflicting sentiments similar to those which are now prevalent among Protestants? Secondly, do you really mean to assert that the extent of harmonious sentiment, sufficient to preserve the unity of the Church in *certain* circumstances, will be sufficient in *all* circumstances to prevent a rupture?

Bellarmine.—As to the first of these questions, whichever answer be given, it will condemn Protestant denominations. If there *were* among the primitive disciples contradictions at all akin to those of Protestantism, then since they existed without splitting the Church into distinct sections, why not now as well as then? And if it be said there were *no* such conflicting sentiments in those days, why cannot Christians in these days get quit of their contradictory opinions?

[1] Union, pp. 73, 74.

Melancthon.—"An attempt was made by certain erring members of the church at Antioch to compel others to conform to their prejudices . . . . Paul and Barnabas, had they obeyed their early prepossessions, would have sided with those who attempted the imposition, but this their fidelity to their Lord, and to Christian liberty, forbade. Or, in the exercise of that high authority which they possessed, and of the great influence they had acquired, they might have put their *veto* on the attempted imposition; but this they forbore."[1]

Bellarmine.—You must admit that the council which assembled soon after in Jerusalem did put a "veto on the attempted imposition." And if the originators of the attempt had, after that veto, adhered to their purpose, there would have been a conflict of sentiment, and, as the result, an open rupture,—a schism,—just like your Protestant schisms.

Lord Herbert.—Or perhaps a *secret* rupture, just like your Romanist schisms.

Melancthon.—"If a church is to be a society of *thinking* as well as of "faithful" men, a perfect and universal identity of sentiment is neither to be expected nor desired; nor does the Bible demand it. This is evident from the language of the Apostle in his Epistle to the Romans. 'Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things; another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him who eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him,' (xiv. 1–3.) Here are two classes of Chris-

[1] Union, p. 25.

tians, in the same church, differing on a doubtful point. And the fact to be remarked is, that the Apostle does not disclose which was right, by deciding the question at issue. But, denouncing their mutual want of charity, he approves the conscientiousness of each, encourages both to retain their respective opinions, and exhorts them, notwithstanding this diversity, to be united and one; assigning as the great reason why each should receive the other, that GOD HATH RECEIVED HIM." [1]

Lord Herbert.—" The fact" which you say is " to be remarked, that the Apostle does not disclose which was right, by deciding the question at issue," is not a fact at all, but your assertion of it is a palpable mistake; for in verse 14 of the same chapter I read thus:—" I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself;" and again, in verse 20, " All things, indeed, are pure." Hence it appears that he does *not* " encourage both to retain their respective opinions." This apostolic decision must have immediately removed collision of judgment between the parties, even if it existed before the decision was given.

Bellarmine.—It is true that he " exhorts them, notwithstanding this diversity, to be united and one;" and the reason is, that this diversity did not involve in itself a collision or contradiction. One party believed that they might lawfully eat herbs only, and the other party that they might eat anything. This latter party, however, pleaded only for the *lawfulness*, not for the *obligation*, of eating all things. Correctly speaking, therefore, their sentiments were not practically in conflict, and the Apostle

[1] Union, pp. 63, 64.

could with great propriety urge those who felt their liberty to use all meats, to suspend that liberty for the sake of weak brethren. In calling these brethren weak, he virtually "decides the question at issue." And the forbearance and self-denial which Paul enjoins loses all its meaning, except we suppose that the stronger brethren abstained on the grounds of love from what they might otherwise have freely partaken of.

Melancthon.—"*During the early ages of Christianity the Church visibly and really maintained its intended unity;* and ought not this consideration to exercise a healing influence on Christians of the present day? With a thousand reasons for division, of which we happily know nothing, the first Christians were one. The petty bickering which occasionally disturbed the peace of a particular society, did not affect the union of the general Church. 'They who are at Rome,' said the Bishop of Cæsarea, in a letter to Cyprian, 'do not entirely observe all things which have been handed down from the beginning. . . . . So likewise, in a very great number of other provinces, many things vary according to the diversity of place and people; but, nevertheless, their variations have at no time infringed the peace and unity of the catholic Church.' Converging from the most opposite points, Christians met together at the cross, and the principle which drew them to that bound them also to each other. And shall that example exist for us in vain? Shall we tempt the world to infer that the Gospel exhausted its benevolent power in its first efforts? that its uniting power is irrecoverably lost? Of this we may be assured, that until we practically regard the unity of the primitive Church as obligatory on ourselves, its

history exists only to aggravate our guilt, and to increase our condemnation." [1]

Lord Herbert.— You involve yourself in this aggravated guilt and increased condemnation. You have failed to shew that any *collision* of sentiment, similar to those that split Protestantism into its denominations, was found in the primitive Church, and yet you have maintained that these Protestant contradictions are compatible with church union. The union which you contend for, therefore, is essentially different from the union of the primitive Church. The " things handed down from the beginning, which they at Rome did not entirely observe," could not have been regarded by those who did observe them as divinely sanctioned, and obligatory upon all, or a schism would immediately have taken place. The " variations" which prevailed in " other provinces," " according to the diversity of place and people," must have been held by all concerned as matters, not only of *less* importance, but such as left all points of duty and doctrine untouched, else the unity of the catholic Church would have been neither " *visible nor real.*"

Bellarmine.—This view of the case is confirmed by the fact, that as soon as collision or contradiction in sentiment developed itself, the Church was rent. Thus " the great sect of the Donatists maintained that their own Church was the only true, uncorrupted, universal Church." [2] And as to the other early sects, it has been remarked:—" It would seem, we must allow, but an ill augury for *denominational distinctions* that the *first* bodies of professed adherents to the religion of Christ, who bore any other name

[1] Union, pp. 275, 276. [2] Ib., p. 98. See pp. 113, 114.

beside that of 'Christians,' were corrupters of the gospel. Such were the Gnostic and Ebionite heretics. . . . . The subsequent extensive separations or 'schisms' of the Novatians and Donatists, however, were not attended with any departure from the Christian doctrine, but related to the grand controversy respecting the manner of dealing with the 'Lapsed,' and to the question, what constitutes the idea of a true Church." [1] Of course, if no contradiction or collision of opinion had been evolved on these last named matters, there would have been no such thing as a prolonged or extensive separation. There seems to be little doubt that the decision of the Jerusalem Synod, and the authoritative announcement of Paul (Rom. xiv. 14) prevented the development, in both instances, of an incipient collision and rupture.

Hence it is manifest that the Protestant Churches have, in this vital point, departed as far from the primitive Church, nay, have in their practice as directly opposed the example of the early Church, as it is alleged *we* have been guilty of doing in other essential matters. For it is true that, "during the early ages of Christianity, the Church visibly and really maintained its intended unity;" and it has just been shewn that this means, there was no separation, and no collision of judgment, which is sure to produce separation. Now, not only is there among Protestants such collisions and such separation, but, incredible as it may appear, some of the ablest and most earnest advocates of union have gone the length of contending that these are no breach of union,—that "Calvinist and Arminian, Presbyterian and Methodist, Episcopalian, Baptist,

[1] Schism, p. 298.

and Independent, are specific names, innocent in themselves; only let love subordinate them to the generic name of Christian, and it will be seen that variety of sect is perfectly compatible with the unity of the Church!!"[1] You ask us sometimes to return to the model of the primitive Church, while you seem to forget that example is better than precept.

Theophilus.—There was another question proposed, namely, is that amount of identity of opinion which is able to unite Christians and prevent schism, *under a certain combination of circumstances*, sufficient to secure the same blessing amid the varied changes of Christian society?

Melancthon.—"Faith and love form the apostolic terms of communion with the Christian Church, the means and substance of its prosperity, and the grand catholicon for all its maladies."[2] "And as any additions to faith and love have at times been found impracticable, so are they always unnecessary."[3] "From the combined influence of this faith and love, it follows that this holy and visible union was *universal*. As it did not originate in a cause peculiar to any particular portion of the Christian Church, but in one common to the whole, it necessarily embraced the entire body. 'We know,' says the Apostle John, 'that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren;' we love them *as brethren*, on account of their spiritual relationship to Christ, their attachment to him, and the traces they exhibit of his Divine image; and therefore, wherever we behold a genuine Christian, we recognise a brother,—a member of the family of Christ. And hence they (the first believers) exhibited a

[1] Union, p. 101. [2] Ib. p. 75. [3] Ib. p. 76.

union not merely of individual Christians, but of churches. Having professed by baptism their *faith* in Christ, they were cordially received to the communion of the Lord's Supper, and having joined in that feast of Christian fellowship with one church, they were deemed eligible to communion with every other church. Tokens of Christian salutation, and offices of brotherly love, were familiarly interchanged. They were ready to unite in the Church on earth with all with whom they hoped to meet and mingle in the worship of the Church in heaven. . . . . If ever the prayer of Christ, 'that they all might be one,' was answered, it was then; when, whatever the internal state of particular churches, they exhibited to the world the sublime and glorious spectacle of a universal *agapa*, to which every Christian brother, on presenting the *tessera* of discipleship, received the cordial welcome of a friend of Christ." [1]

Lord Herbert.—These remarks contain, no doubt, a direct answer, or what appears such, to the question proposed. But before inquiring whether they contain the *right* answer, a preliminary question occurs,—are they intelligible or self-consistent? If *that faith* in Christ which constitutes a man a true Christian, as you speak, be *all* that is necessary to secure his continuance in the true Church, and hence to preserve its unity unbroken, then how can there be such a thing as schism at all? If an individual be a true Christian, you say, he is on that account alone a member of the Church. So long, then, as he is a true Christian, he cannot be a schismatic; and if he is not, or cease to be, a true Christian, neither can

[1] Union, pp. 80–82.

he be a schismatic; he is, then, a heretic or an unbeliever.

Melancthon.—Please to listen to what my explanation of schism is. "As the union of the Christian Church is twofold, consisting of faith in Christ and love to the brethren, it is evident that it must be capable of a twofold rupture. The breach of the former is heresy or apostacy, the violation of the latter is schism. But as apostacy, or a departure from God, necessarily includes schism, or a departure from the brethren, so schism, in its scriptural import, argues an impaired state of faith in Christ, and tends to impair it still farther. Schism, therefore, is to be regarded as the breach of the unity of the Church." [1]

Lord Herbert.—Faith in Christ and love to the brethren form, as you assert, the terms of communion, to which any additions are at once "impracticable" and "unnecessary." You have said also that "the breach" of faith, which is heresy or apostacy, "necessarily involves schism, or a departure from the brethren." In like manner, it appears to me, that schism necessarily involves apostacy, inasmuch as you hold that "love is the natural result of faith," [2] and as the very scripture which you lately quoted asserts: "he that loveth not his brother abideth in death."—(1 John iii. 14). Whereas you have just said, that "schism argues an impaired state of faith in Christ." Now this "*impaired state of faith in Christ*" is that faith in Christ which is one of the terms of communion, or it is not. If the schismatic's faith is *so much* impaired as to be *destroyed*, then schism involves apostacy, and as apostacy also involves schism, they can never be found

[1] Union, p. 83. [2] Ib. p. 77.

developed separately, and for all practical purposes the distinction between them vanishes away. If now you affirm that the schismatic's faith is only damaged, but not destroyed, you must also tell us to *what extent* faith may be damaged or impaired without being altogether ruined, before your definition of the terms of communion has any theoretic meaning, or any practical value.

Bellarmine.—If it be true of the early Christians, that "they were ready to unite in the Church on earth with all with whom they hoped to meet and mingle in the worship of the Church in heaven," and if their example be binding upon all believers, it is plain as language can speak, that schism argues not only an impaired, but even an extinct faith. If "*faith* in Christ" be the "tessera of discipleship," which entitles every individual who possesses it, to "the cordial welcome of a friend of Christ," both by the "Church on earth," and "the Church in heaven," then I long to hear the distinction between heresy and schism.

Melancthon.—"Truth is one and indivisible; but the introduction of error is an introduction of an element of division. Christian love, the product of that truth, is one; and is meant to place us in harmony with all that receive it; but to make that which is not essential to salvation essential to Christian communion is error, and as such is an element of division in the Christian Church."[1]

Lord Herbert.—In the first place, I have never yet heard of any Protestant denomination which professes to make its terms of communion identical with what it considers to be the terms of salvation. By this canon of

[1] Union, p. 114.

yours the Protestant Churches are all condemned, and the Church of Rome stands acquitted. In the second place, since "the introduction of error is an introduction of an element of division," it follows that there is an element of division in every case of conflicting judgments or contradictory opinions. For in every such case one of the parties is necessarily in error.

Melancthon.—By "truth," I mean Christian truth, that "*substantial oneness of faith*" which is essential to union. "While more than *substantial* agreement is unnecessary and unattainable. But this is not only attainable, it already exists. Justification by faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God, together with the doctrines which it necessarily involves, is held alike by Episcopalian and Presbyterian, Independent, Methodist, Baptist, and Friend, and by all the orthodox sections of which the Christian community consists."[1]

Bellarmine.—How can any man believe the two affirmations which we have now heard? First, "To make that which is not essential to salvation essential to Christian communion is error, and as such is an element of division in the Christian Church"—an error and element of division, which plainly pervades Protestantism; for if it did not, her denominations would immediately merge into one. And, secondly, in direct opposition to the above statement, it is affirmed, that "substantial oneness of faith," and "substantial agreement," *more than which* "*is unnecessary and unattainable,*" "is not only attainable, but already exists," among these different denominations!!

Melancthon.—To heal the breaches of the Church, "we

[1] Union, p. 222.

do ask" Protestants, "that they will cease to treat the great principles which they hold in common as trifles, and to exalt trifles into the throne of great principles— . . . that they will remember that there is a principle of union existing between the pious Churchman and the pious Dissenter infinitely more intimate and binding than there is between either of these and the irreligious of their respective communities, that while the bond which unites the one is accidental and temporary, that which unites the other is fastened by the hand of God himself, and fastened for eternity—that they will bear in mind that, as Christians, they belong properly to no one external communion, but that whatever they have or are in this capacity, they possess only in common with the entire body of the faithful."[1]

Lord Herbert.—There is scarcely anything in this statement but what has been already exposed. No truth is a trifle; and if it be only on trifles that Protestants differ, their divisions are the greatest scandal. If the principle of union "between the pious Churchman and the pious Dissenter" be indeed "infinitely more intimate and binding" than that between Churchmen simply as Churchmen, and between Dissenters solely as Dissenters, then surely would both church and dissent be rent in pieces, that "the pious" on both sides might meet and mingle together.

Bellarmine.—If Christians, "as Christians, belong properly to no one external communion," then whoever belongs to an external communion belongs to it *im*properly; and there can be no such thing as a *visible* church at all;

[1] Union, p. 272.

and what "the entire body of the faithful possess in common" is something so impalpable that it cannot be made manifest to the world.

Theophilus.—The position that the same identity of opinion which preserves the union of the Church in some circumstances is sufficient to preserve it always, has certainly not been made good by argument. It is assumed in these appeals to the primitive Church on the question of union, but scarcely an effort has been made to prove it. If, as has been said, faith and love were *the* terms of Christian fellowship, the position would be tenable; but we have seen that this definition of the terms of communion proves too much. Schism and apostacy must be carefully distinguished; for schism means a rent in *the Church*, so that both parties can make good their claim to discipleship. To attempt, therefore, to identify the terms of communion with the terms of salvation is a palpable mystification of the whole question.

Since "truth is one and indivisible; and the introduction of error is an introduction of an element of division;" it would appear that as error is multiform, the sources of schism are numerous; and, consequently, the amount of truth known at any particular period, though sufficient to expel and dissipate the errors of that period, might not be sufficient to neutralise the errors of a subsequent time. Many questions have agitated the later Church which were never proposed or thought of in the early Church. Such questions may, therefore, become occasions of schism in modern days; while the early Church was not exposed to the temptation of falling into such schisms, nor was it in the possession of that knowledge, which alone, by solv-

ing the agitated questions, can effectually prevent or heal the schisms which they occasion. Inasmuch as *contradiction among Christians on any matter of doctrine or duty* invariably produces schism, in the form either of an open rupture, or of a secret mutual distrust and opposition, accompanied in both instances by alienation of affection, while yet both parties may be genuine believers, it appears that such schism or contradiction, as it arises from time to time on a vast variety of subjects, can only be obviated or repaired by Christians increasing in knowledge.

In the work of sanctifying human society, which the Christian Church is appointed by God to perform, and destined to achieve, she finds ever and anon in her path new difficulties and fresh perplexities, springing up from the complicated relationships of life. As she pursues her onward course, "turning the world upside down," she is again and again beclouded with the dust of demolished strongholds, and involved in all the turmoil of a revolution. She can perform her part aright amid this ever-changing and trying scene, only by depending on "the Spirit of truth," and by "giving all diligence to add to her faith virtue, and to virtue *knowledge*." If at the crisis of a nation's history, or amid the throes of a labouring community, the Church shall be divided in sentiment in regard to the special truth, which can alone pilot the nation securely over the crisis, or in regard to the special duty whose performance shall effectually relieve and help the community in its travail, who does not perceive that in a Church so situated there is a schism, as palpable in its manifestation, as it is painful and perilous in its consequences? Hence the validity of our conclusion will appear,

that the only way to avoid schism is to avoid conflicting opinions on questions of duty and truth.

This conclusion would be set aside, if it could be shewn that in the primitive Church such conflicting sentiments found a place without damaging or endangering her union. Reasons have been assigned for asserting that the variety of sentiment found in the early Christian community was plainly and decidedly different from the contradictions that rend the modern Church. While, therefore, the maintenance of its real and visible union by the primitive Church is an example which we should follow, and which ought "to exercise a healing influence on Christians of the present day," it may still be true that amid the new and complex and entangled interests of our own times, a considerably greater degree of knowledge,—a clearer view and a firmer hold of certain principles, than the ancients possessed,—may be altogether indispensable to the cordial union and co-operation of modern Christians.

Are the terms of Christian communion, then, it will be asked, to vary from age to age? Variation of an unworthy kind is not implied in anything that has been advanced. The principle which regulates the terms of communion remains unchanged during the whole history of the Church. But this principle implies and demands from Christians advancement in knowledge or a more intimate acquaintance with truth. And does not every genuine Christian desire such progress? Is it not enjoined in Scripture? Is it not illustrated by the history of the past, and required by the urgency of present circumstances? Has not the Holy Spirit been promised to lead the disciples into all truth? It is plainly the duty, therefore, of

every Christian diligently and honestly to seek to know the truth more and more, as well as to endeavour to obey all the truth which he does know. The Christian community will thus be distinguished by growth in grace and increase in knowledge. Every one who acts consistently upon this principle will suspend his judgment on any question till he has bestowed upon it mature and conscientious investigation, and will profess to believe as true only what he has found by such investigation to be true. Conflicting and incompatible opinions on matters of truth and duty would thus disappear, like so many portentous clouds, from the atmosphere of the Church of Christ. And that atmosphere, henceforth untroubled by the stormy and desolating schisms which these clouds discharge, would be irradiated by the light, and warmed by the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, in all the salubrity and glory of his unveiled splendour.

DIALOGUE III.

THE LIMITS OF VISIBLE UNIFORMITY.

I.—*Is Unity Independent of Uniformity?*

Melancthon.—"As ecclesiastical laws have no power to sway the secret convictions and dispositions of men, outward uniformity is the utmost which they can effect; and this may consequently exist in the absence of those elements of character which are indispensable to Christian unity. This unity, on the other hand, is independent of uniformity in outward observances which Christianity has not made binding, as clearly appears from the facts relating to the diversities of practice which existed in the apostolic age in regard to the Mosaic ritual. The attempt, therefore, to render outward observances essential to visible unity, is an innovation on the laws of Christ."[1]

Lord Herbert.—I am sorely puzzled to understand how *visible* unity can be altogether independent of *outward* observances.

Bellarmine.—Our friend did indeed conclude with a statement to that effect. But did you not notice that he had qualified his statement in a former sentence thus:

[1] Schism, p. 183.

" Outward observances *which Christianity has not made binding?*"

Lord Herbert.—Very good. The question is now so simple and clear that a child can understand it. *What are those outward observances which Christianity has made binding?*

Melancthon.—" That one individual was of the Jewish, another of the Proselyte, or a third of the Gentile *denomination* of Christians, was no lawful obstacle to entire unity of heart,"[1] in the primitive age.

Lord Herbert.—We have already seen that there were no *denominations* of Christians in the first ages, in the same sense, or any thing approaching it, as there are now.

Bellarmine.—And so the Jewish, Proselyte, and Gentile denominations just spoken of were not only " no lawful obstacle to entire unity of heart," but no *actual* obstacle to entire *visible* unity.

Melancthon.—" The kingdom of God was 'not in meat and in drink, but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' It did not consist in things external, but in things spiritual."[2]

Lord Herbert.—When Christians " had all things common," that was not an *external!*

Bellarmine.—When the brethren in one locality " assembled with one accord," that was not an *external!*

Melancthon.—" Its genuine subjects were to be known by their cherishing a certain delicacy of feeling respecting each other's conscientious scruples, on points not affecting the essence of Christianity; and they were to reverence each other's liberty, as a trust belonging to those who

[1] Schism, p. 73. [2] Ib. p. 73.

must each 'give an account of *himself* to God.' 'No man' was 'to put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way.' 'Every man' was to be 'fully persuaded in his own mind' that his peculiar observances were *his duties* in the sight of God; and all were to 'follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.' Now do not these apostolic facts and testimonies (Rom. xiv. 1 Cor. viii. x. 25–29) furnish, in themselves, a strong presumption that the essential unity of the Christian Church is independent of uniformity in things external. Where is the evidence to the contrary?"

Lord Herbert.—Evidence to the contrary has just been alleged. Though it had not, it were unfair in you to throw off the burden of adducing *positive* proof in defence of your own assertion, and call upon us for *negative* proof to overthrow it. If the Bible really teaches that "every man is to be fully persuaded in his own mind that his peculiar observances are *his duties* in the sight of God," we shall forthwith register that book in a conspicuous place in the catalogue of our library, and display it on our shelves. We only hope that, in future, it will teach Christians "to respect *our* conscientious scruples," and to "reverence *our* liberty." It is utterly vain to assert that, in these statements, you refer *only* to "points not affecting the essence of Christianity." For, in the first place, you must then tell us distinctly, and without equivocation, and without an *et cetera* at the end of your statement, *what* are the points that affect the essence of Christianity? And, in the second place, you must explain *how and why it is*, that when these points are concerned, you exclude all

that reverence for liberty, and that respect for conscientious scruples, which you contend for so strenuously on every other point? To both these questions we look in vain for an answer.

Bellarmine.—Besides, there has been an apparently dexterous shifting of ground. The question was: What are those external observances which Christianity has made binding? Instead of hearing what these are, the discussion is turned to "points not affecting the essence of Christianity." At best, this is only a *negative* answer to the question. It is, moreover, an evasion, unless it can be shewn that Christianity makes binding those points only which affect its essence.

Melancthon.—"Men of *various religious denominations*, including persons of the highest eminence, both clerical and lay, and the most celebrated divines of the Reformation, have held the principle that the *external form* of the Church is *not essential* to its nature. Into the merits of the *grounds* and *bearings* of their respective opinions it is not necessary to enter. Some arrived at their conclusions by a different road from others, and few thoroughly understood the true character of that religious freedom (freedom from responsibility to *man* for religious faith), which many have claimed in opposing Rome. But the intellect and piety of the Reformation, and of the denominations which sprang out of it, including the Church of England in particular, have, for the most part, given their suffrage, *theoretically* at least, to the axiom, that the Church of Christ may exist under different outward forms."[1]

[1] Schism, pp. 97, 98.

Bellarmine.—This is an appeal to human authority, at which I am a little surprised; and the more so, that your authorities, as you acknowledge, are at variance among themselves in their deeper views of the question, on which they professedly agree;—a circumstance which you never fail to use, when you can, in your assaults upon us.

Lord Herbert.—But this axiom, if properly understood, carries a conclusion exactly the reverse of that, which it is adduced to support. The axiom, as held by the Reformers, and by the Churches of the Reformation, and by "the Church of England in particular," means that the Church of Christ may exist, *in different countries, or in different ages,* under different outward forms. It is not held by the Church of England in any of her authorised symbols, nor by any church that we know of, *as a church,* that the Church of Christ may lawfully exist, *in the same place, and at the same time,* under different outward forms. When the Church of Christ is found under different outward forms *in the same place, schism* is developed. If, in this statement, I misrepresent the true ideal of the Church, or the real nature of schism, I shall be glad to be corrected.

Melancthon.—"Schism is directly opposed to mutual Christian sympathy and love—to visible unity and union. Its germ is found in estrangement and alienation of heart among Christians, from whatever cause this may arise; and it is manifested by disregard to each other's feelings and welfare, for the sake of some selfish end, which is inconsistent with charity, and with the peace and harmony of the Church. This alienation of mind, when it has

reached a certain stage, tends directly to impair the visible unity of a Christian society, by the exhibition of an uncharitable spirit, through all its degrees, from exclusiveness and reserve, to the altercation and strife of party and faction. A dividing spirit in the Church (where charity should reign) is the spirit of SCHISM." [1]

Bellarmine.—Well, I cannot perceive and appreciate "*visible* unity and union," when, in the very same neighbourhood, the Church exists "under different outward forms." "These different outward forms" certainly produce, and they have generally originated in, "estrangement and alienation of heart." Besides, these "different outward forms" are surely evidence incontestable of separation or division; and you have just said, that "a dividing spirit in the Church is the spirit of schism."

Lord Herbert.—Even admitting that a few select instances could be adduced, in which different outward forms, or separate organizations, in the same place, had no connection whatever, either in their origin or continuance, with "estrangement and alienation of heart among Christians," still it might be shown that the existence of denominations involves the criminality of schism, if it be true, that "the schismatical conduct of many good men is founded on misconception;" and that "this will never be remedied by any means that are not adapted to convince the judgment, and to soften prejudice." [2]

Melancthon.—There may be schism without actual separation; but I do not see that schism is necessarily involved in actual separation.

Bellarmine.—What, then, is your notion of *a* church,—

[1] Schism, pp. 218, 219. [2] Ib. p. 460.

that is, of a congregation which forms an integral portion of *the* Church? For, I suppose, we are agreed in holding that there is but one true Church.

Melancthon.—"We may define a visible Church of Christ, in the language of the 'Articles of Religion,' 'a body of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly administered, according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.'"[1]

Lord Herbert.—If this definition applies equally well to two denominations, then "visible unity and union" is marred, if not destroyed, for these reasons:—1. There is no palpable and unambiguous mark or sign of visible unity and union. 2. The separation or actual division between two denominations is a strong presumption, if not full evidence, of schism. 3. This presumption or evidence seems insuperable, on the ground that, in free countries, there is no other way to distinguish externally between the orthodox and the heterodox. If one body of Christians shall regard another body of men, who also call themselves Christians, as denying some of what they call the essentials of their religion, they have no other way to mark *this all-important difference*, as they say, than emerging into two separate denominations. It does seem strange, then, that they should take the very same step in manifesting their *non*-essential or trivial differences. Again, supposing that there were no force in these objections, and that denominationalism is legitimate—that there may be *many* denominations which shall all agree to the above definition, without any prejudice to their "visible unity

[1] Schism, p. 39.

and union"—the question deserves to be considered and answered, What are the *limits* of this denominationalism? Is the erection of a new denomination always to be a matter of purest accident, or frivolous whim, or conceited caprice, or angry passion? It surely is not irrelevant to inquire, What are the points on which a difference of opinion will justify a separate denomination? For if every non-essential variety of sentiment can justify such a step, we might awake some morning to find "every two or three who meet together" constituting themselves into a denomination! And to look in such circumstances for an undoubted proof of "visible unity and union," would be like seeking rest on the troubled sea.

Bellarmine.—Taking the above definition of the Church of England, it seems undeniable that, if we really abide by it, we are constrained to acknowledge there can be only one visible Church; and if it be visibly divided, that division is schism. For if there be a body of men in which the pure Word of God is *not* preached, and the sacraments be *not* duly ministered,[1] in any *one* thing that of necessity is requisite to the same, then that body of men is not faithful, and they are not a visible Church of Christ. Whereas, if there be two bodies of faithful men, in both of which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same, then indeed they are both, according to the definition, visible Churches of Christ. But it is just as evident, that inasmuch as they are not

[1] The word is "ministered" in the symbolical books of the Church of England, and not "administered," as in the quotation from "Schism."

visibly one, by reason of their separate organizations, the visible Church of Christ is in a state of schism.

Melancthon.—"Something more than *externals* is necessary to constitute the Church of Christ."[1]

Lord Herbert.—This implies, what you overlook, but cannot deny, that *some externals are necessary.*

Melancthon.—"Different views and practices may prevail among Christians on the subject of church government. (for instance), without any detriment to unity, or to the highest fraternal love. This love, they hold, may be demonstrated to the world by means of mutual Christian intercourse, by co-operation in doing good, by occasionally worshipping together in public, or even uniting in the eucharist. For they judge that unity of heart and union of effort practically answer all the most valuable purposes of uniformity. Thus making a virtue of necessity, in the *best sense*, they wish to render diversity of opinion an occasion of charity."[2]

Bellarmine.—Well, then, let us take an example, and suppose two congregations in one town, a Presbyterian and an Independent one, which, as *congregations*, cultivate respectively Christian intercourse with Presbyterians and Independents elsewhere, but little or none with each other. Is there in this fact no "detriment to visible unity, or to the highest fraternal love?" Each of these two congregations seeks and obtains—with other congregations at a distance, of whom they must know less than they know of each other—more visible unity and a higher fraternal love than they share with each other. The just interpretation of this state of matters is, that the mutual religious

[1] Schism, p. 42. [2] Ib. p. 42.

intercourse between Independents, *as Independents*, and between Presbyterians, *as Presbyterians*, and so on, is of a more close and endearing character than that between Christians, *as Christians*. But then, you will say, this is counterbalanced and obviated by their "co-operation in doing good, by occasionally worshipping together in public, or even uniting in the eucharist." This co-operation in doing good must, in the circumstances, be necessarily *limited*, as we see it is so in fact, and this worshipping together in public only *occasional*, as you are candid enough to grant. Hence the inconsistency of their mutual conduct, and the presence of schism in the visible church, are more strikingly displayed. You speak of "unity of heart and union of effort," as attainable without "uniformity;" but it is plain in this case that the absence of *a certain degree* of uniformity is equivalent to a deficiency in "union of effort," and both of these prove, as they spring from, a lack of "unity of heart." There is only *one good* sense in which men can make a virtue of necessity,—namely, by acting honourably in a trying position. This is very different from attempting to conceal a dishonourable division under an honourable name, or making our abundant charity atone for our defective rectitude.

Theophilus.—The depreciation of outward observances and external uniformity, which is so frequently resorted to in order to conceal the undoubted truth that some amount of visible conformity is indispensable to visible union, and in order to evade the distinct and important question, what precisely is that amount? is a course of proceeding most unworthy of this high subject. We are

surprised to find it so frequently adopted, and by men of so much eminence.

As to the hinging question in this controversy, may the Church of Christ exist under different outward forms? it is necessary to attend to the distinctions already adverted to. This question, if it is to be held relevant in the present discussion, must be understood to mean, may the Church of Christ, *at the same time and in the same place*, exist under different outward forms, *without the guilt of schism being incurred?* This question ought, we think, to be answered in the negative, for some reasons which have been already assigned, and for others which may yet be brought forward. In respect to the special point, what deliverance on this question has been given by "the intellect and piety of the Reformation, and by the denominations which sprang out of it," we would now offer a few remarks. We doubt not that it is the opinion of the Protestant world, that the Church of Christ may exist, *in different places and in different times*, under different outward forms; but we as little doubt that a verdict may be obtained from the Protestant Churches in favour of the view which we are now advocating.

To begin with the Church of England, the nineteenth "Article of Religion," which has been already quoted, most certainly supports our position, by an obvious implication which Bellarmine has clearly stated. All doubt upon the matter, however, is removed when we turn to the "Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical." Let any one read the first twelve of these, and say, if the question is left in the slightest ambiguity. For example, No. 11 runs thus: "Whosoever shall hereafter affirm or maintain,

that there are within this realm other meetings, assemblies, or congregations of the king's born subjects, than such as by the laws of this land are held and allowed, which may rightly challenge to themselves the name of true and lawful Churches; let him be excommunicated," &c. This is an inference from the assertion in No. 3, that "the Church of England is a true and Apostolical Church" For wherever there is a true and Apostolical Church, and at the same time, Christians who live in the same place and are not in communion with it, there most indubitably schism is incurred on the part of one or other of the parties.

Let us now hear what the Confession of Augsburg says, which was presented to Charles V. in 1530, by the protesting princes and states of Germany. "For the true unity of the Church, it is sufficient to agree upon the doctrine of the gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments."[1] Now, many denominations that are even called evangelical do not agree upon the doctrine of the gospel, when their views are stringently examined. But, passing that, how can it be maintained that two denominational congregations in one locality "agree upon the administration of the Sacraments?" Two sacramental boards are erected, not because one cannot accommodate all the communicants, but because one party, however few in number, is Independent, and another party, however few, is Episcopalian or Presbyterian. Even though these two parties should agree as to the times and mode of observing the ordinance, and a hundred other minutiæ, such acts of uniformity are worthless, so long as they practically insist

[1] Art. 7.

upon having two tables, simply and solely because they differ on the matter of church government. Inasmuch, then, as they differ, so palpably and so painfully, upon the administration of this Sacrament, the unity of the Church is broken.

The former Confession of Helvetia dates from 1536, and was presented to the Assembly of Divines at Wirtemburg. The year following it was allowed of the whole assembly of Smalcald, including all the divines and degrees of Protestants. This Confession says:—"The which Church, though it be manifest to the eyes of God alone, yet is it not only seen and known, by certain outward rites instituted of Christ himself, and by the Word of God, as by a public and lawful discipline; but it is so appointed, that without these marks no man can be judged to be in this Church, but by the special privilege of God."[1] Here it is plainly enough taught that the Church is only seen and known by "certain outward rites," which are consequently an indispensable part of the visible Church; and it is further affirmed that, in ordinary circumstances, no man can be regarded as belonging to the Church if he practically disregard these marks, or, in other words, neglect to observe the Sacraments. What, then, can be a surer indication of schism than separate ecclesiastical organizations, which would indeed cease to be separate, if the respective parties were at one in the ministration of the New Testament rites? The very existence of a denomination demands a separate font and a separate eucharist. This diversity and mutual opposition in the observance of those very outward rites, on which the visibility of the Church

[1] Art. 14.

immediately depends, is unmistakeably schism, if schism be not the shadow of a shade.

The Confession of France was presented to Francis the Second in 1559, in the French language. It was published in Latin, in 1566, by the pastors of the French Churches, with a Preface to all other evangelical pastors. Article 26 declares, "that it is not lawful for any man to withdraw himself from the congregations, and to rest in himself, but rather that all men are to defend and to preserve the unity of the Church, submitting themselves to the common instruction, and to the yoke of Christ, wheresoever God doth appoint that true ecclesiastical discipline, although the decrees of magistrates should gainsay it; from which order, whosoever do separate themselves, they do resist the ordinance of God." If, then, there be, as is here affirmed, a true ecclesiastical discipline, separatists from which do resist the ordinance of God, there cannot be two denominations in one place, except by one or other of them resisting a divine ordinance.

The latter Confession of Helvetia was framed in 1566, and approved and subscribed, not only by the Churches of that country, but also by those of Geneva, Savoy, Poland, Hungary, and Scotland. It affirms "that such as would be saved must in no wise separate themselves from the true Church of Christ." This might lead to the purest ultramontanism, if this Confession did not teach in the same chapter, the seventeenth, that "there have at all times been great contentions in the Church; and the most excellent doctors of the Church have, about no small matters, differed in opinion, yet so as, in the meantime, the Church ceased not to be the Church, for all these conten-

tions." We infer, from these two statements, that since there is but one true Church, out of which salvation is difficult, if not impossible, when contentions arise, or doctors differ in opinion, so as that the Church, without ceasing to be the Church, exists under different outward forms in the same place, its unity is broken, though its essential character is not destroyed.

The Confession of Belgia was first issued in 1566, in French, and, thirteen years afterwards, being translated into the Belgian tongue, it was confirmed by the Synod of Belgium. It declares, that "whosoever do either depart from the true Church, or refuse to join themselves unto it, do openly resist the commandment of God." And again, after specifying the marks of the Church, affirms, "by these notes, I say, it is certain that the true Church may be discerned. From the which it is not lawful for any man to be severed." These statements support the inference, that if there are two or more denominations in one place, and each of them has the marks of the true Church, then either there is more than one true Church, or that one Church is in that place in a state of schism.

Other Confessions might have been quoted, but, to avoid repetitions, we refrain. Our last reference is to the Westminster Confession, and Form of Church Government. In chapter xxvi. of the Confession, it is said, "Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God." This statement is obviously applicable to "saints by profession," who are living near each other, as is still more fully manifest, from what is added in the same section:—"which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all

those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus." No language could have been used which would have more expressly condemned our prevailing denominationalism. In the present state of matters, *Independents by profession* " maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God," and so do Presbyterians and Episcopalians and Baptists. In order that " saints by profession" may maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, these distinctions must be effaced from the escutcheon of the Church.

In " the Form of Church Government adopted by the Westminster Assembly, there is the following section, entitled, " of particular congregations:"—" It is lawful and expedient that there be fixed congregations; that is, a certain company of Christians, to meet in one assembly ordinarily for publick worship. When believers multiply to such a number, that they cannot conveniently meet in one place, it is lawful and expedient that they should be divided into distinct and fixed congregations, for the better administration of such ordinances as belong unto them, and the discharge of mutual duties. The ordinary way of dividing Christians into distinct congregations, and most expedient for edification, is by the respective bounds of their dwellings. *First*, Because they who dwell together, being bound to all kind of moral duties one to another, have the better opportunity thereby to discharge them; which moral tye is perpetual; for Christ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. *Secondly*, The communion of saints must be so ordered as may stand with the most convenient use of the ordinances and discharge of moral duties, without respect of persons. *Thirdly*, The pastor

and people must so nearly cohabit together, as that they may mutually perform their duties each to other with most conveniency." Here we have a precise principle laid down to direct us in the formation of separate congregations. If it be alleged that it is not an exclusive principle, —that an increase of numbers is declared to be simply "the ordinary and most expedient way," to this we reply, that denominationalism introduces a principle not here nor elsewhere recognised,—a principle which not only requires yet to be clearly announced and satisfactorily defended, but which also, so far as we can judge of it by its fruits, may be shewn to be sometimes opposed to the rule given by the Westminster divines. If their method be *the most* expedient, as they assert it is, it has very frequently been set aside for another, which must be regarded in their judgment as less expedient; for again and again, and a thousand times, has a distinct and fixed congregation been formed in a town, not as the result of "believers multiplying" there to such a number that they could not conveniently meet in the places of worship already erected, but as a testimony in behalf of some denominational peculiarity. In all such cases, "the ordinary way of dividing Christians into distinct congregations, and *most expedient for edification*," is undoubtedly disregarded. If the liberty of acting thus be denied to denominationalism, it will receive its fatal wound.

II.—*Can there be separation without Schism?*

Melancthon.—"The *ecclesiastical* idea of schism, is separation from a particular Christian assembly, and from its

pastor or pastors, for some cause supposed by that Church to be insufficient or unlawful. That such a separation may proceed from a schismatical or contentious spirit, is unquestionable. When thus arising from an uncharitable temper, manifesting itself in faction, pride, self-sufficiency, or envy; separation may, in perfect accordance with the spirit of the scripture testimony, be regarded as a *finished act* of *schism.* Still, it is obvious that every case of separation from a Christian Church must be judged of by its own merits; and a complication of circumstances may often require to be taken into the account, before we are entitled to pronounce a given instance of separation schismatical, as arising from a state of mind at variance with the charity of the gospel."[1]

Lord Herbert.—This appears to me to be a very strange mode of reasoning. For, in the first place, if the guilt and error of schism lie *entirely* in "a state of mind at variance with the charity of the gospel," then separation never can in any instance be a *finished act* of schism. In the second place, since separation must be acknowledged in some cases at least to be an essential part of schism, its "finished act," just as the taking of life is the finished act of murder, it is necessary, and may be practicable, to distinguish between separations from pure accident, and separations by negligence, and separations by design, as murder is distinguished from manslaughter, and both from accidental death. If a separation of Christians arise by accident, it need not, perhaps, be called schism; but then it is plain that there is, in this instance, no ground to justify it, and no reason whatever for its continuance. If

[1] Schism, p. 233.

the separation occur through thoughtlessness and indiscretion, is there no guilt of schism in it? Are there no evil consequences? *May it* not, *ought it* not, to be healed?

Bellarmine.—It thus appears that "the complication of circumstances," under cover of which separation is palliated or defended, may be so exposed as to manifest the inexcusableness of separation on any possible supposition. If the separation spring from a decided and obdurate unchristian temper, it is schism of the worst type. If the separation be the result of haste, negligence, and imprudence, the sooner it is repaired the better. And, lastly, if it be a separation of pure contingency and merest accident, there is not the shadow of excuse for its prolongation. You admit that "separation" is *in itself* an evil.[1]

Melancthon.—"So long as human authority and tradition are placed on a level scarcely inferior to that of inspiration, partial and unscriptural views respecting schism and unity, will continue to prevail; we shall still hear of some one denomination of Christians claiming to be '*the only true Church*;' while all the other Christian bodies in a nation are 'sects;' their members 'sectarians,' 'separatists,' and 'schismatics;' and the most conscientious and peaceable maintenance of their own church-form and order is 'sectarianism' and 'schism.'"[2]

Lord Herbert.—A better vindication of what you sometimes call latitudinarianism I have never heard. If every man's "own church-form and order" is right, because *he pleads* that he is conscientious, and maintains it peaceably, then *we* are as right as you. But again, if *your* denomi-

[1] Schism, p. 267. [2] Ib. p. 244.

nation be not "the only true Church," it is because you have added to the legitimate terms of communion, terms of your own, based on "human authority or tradition." If the terms of communion in your denomination be those enjoined in Scripture, and those *only*, then all who separate from you must be "sectarians," "separatists," and "schismatics."

Bellarmine.—It thus appears that the *formation* of separate denominations necessarily involves that profane assumption of authority which is falsely charged upon the Vicar of Christ; while the attempted defence of these denominations lands their advocate in the mire of scepticism.

Melancthon.—"It may safely be affirmed, that *wheresoever separation in worship and communion takes place in an uncharitable spirit, it cannot fail to involve more or less of what may be termed schismatical.*"[1]

Lord Herbert.—It is a miraculous charity that can believe that a "separation in worship and communion" can take place among neighbour Christians, without impairing or damaging what they call their brotherly love and affection.

Bellarmine.—It is manifest, therefore, that, on this principle *every* separation in worship and communion, except when demanded by an increase of numbers, is schismatical.

Melancthon.—"That there are cases in which voluntary withdrawment from communion is *not schism* is allowed on all sides, whatever differences of opinion may exist as to the circumstances under which it is innocent."[2]

[1] Schism, p. 268, 269. [2] Ib. p. 276.

Lord Herbert.—When voluntary withdrawment is not schism on the part of those who withdraw, it is schism on the part of those who remain. For they who withdraw without a good and sufficient reason, are schismatics; or they who remain are schismatics, if they afford a good and sufficient reason to any for withdrawing.

Bellarmine.—Hence this non-schismatical voluntary withdrawment is a mere subterfuge. Since one party in a separation cannot be excused without the other party being blamed. And "the all sides" on which you say this principle is allowed do not include the opponents of Christianity, nor the adherents of the holy Catholic Church, but only denominational Protestants. *They* are forced to allow it in self-defence; but like many other unserviceable weapons, it wounds those who wield it.

Melancthon.—"If St Paul countenanced Jewish devotional rights, in which Gentile Christians were excused from uniting, the *principle* that cases of voluntary separation in worship may occur without sin on either side, and therefore without schism, would seem to be established."[1]

Lord Herbert.—Were there *Jewish and Gentile denominations* in the days of Paul?

Bellarmine.—Nothing of the kind. There was no separation in Christian fellowship and worship, as in the Protestant Churches. While maintaining unbroken union in public worship, and the observance of the Lord's Supper, the Jew was circumcised and the Gentile was not. Besides, if there may be separation "without sin on either side,"[2] what can be your reason for saying that "a certain degree of separation may be the best choice among

[1] Schism, pp. 291, 292. [2] Ib. p. 292.

evils,"[1] and "separation should be carried to the least possible extent,"[2] or in what way is it "undesirable?"[3]

Melancthon.—I never meant to say that there were such separations as our denominations in the early age of Christianity. "Diversities of *rite* and *custom*, being matter of liberty, were, as we have seen, no bar to unity; and the same may be said in reference to *church government*, in the most primitive times. . . . . Notwithstanding any such diversities as these, it does not appear that they were the occasion of formal distinctions of communion, like those of our modern *denominations*, which take their name from some peculiarity not essentially connected with the doctrine or the morals of Christianity."[4]

Lord Herbert.—Here, then, you renounce your own argument in support of the principle, that there may be denominational "separation without sin on either side."

Bellarmine.—And Protestantism is proved to be a departure, so far as this matter goes, from the primitive model of Christianity.

Theophilus.—Can you account for the fact that has been admitted, that in spite not only of diversities of opinion, and variety in church government, and considerable disorders and corruptions in the early Church, there was no such thing as denominational separation?

Melancthon.—"The reason may be, that great as were (these diversities and) the delinquencies of many who belonged to these Churches, nothing was *imposed as a term of union and communion*—nothing required, in any way, to be *done* or *sanctioned*, personally, by any one, *as a*

[1] Schism, p. 292. [2] Ib. p. 292. [3] Ib. p. 292.
[4] Ib. pp. 294, 295. See also p. 467.

member of the body—which pained, or rendered uneasy the conscience of a Christian, whose mind was mainly influenced by devotion, by the sincere love of truth, and by charity." [1]

Lord Herbert.—Why could the same plan not be adopted and followed by Christians *now?* You acknowledge that denominations "take their name from some peculiarity not essentially connected with the doctrine or the morals of Christianity." And it follows from what you have just said, that denominations could have no existence as such, unless these peculiarities were made "terms of union and communion." In doing so, there is an undisguised "assumption of spiritual power." You ought, therefore, to take to yourself a rebuke which you penned on behalf of others. "Our brother may err in laying too great stress on minor points, either through ignorance, weakness of faith, or even a somewhat uncharitable tenacity, and love of independence; but *we* may err far *more*, and may be said to lay still greater stress on these very points, by demanding conformity with our own practice as the price of unity. Our brother's fault may be a 'weak conscience;'—ours would be presumption." [2]

Melancthon.—"If we must wait till men of all varieties of education, prejudice, and party, think alike on all the points at issue,—what prospect (humanly speaking), but that the disunion of the professing Church will be perpetuated; that it will never cease—no, not even before her Master's second coming." [3]

Bellarmine.—But we have just seen that the primitive disciples did *not* "think alike on all the points at issue,"

[1] Schism, p. 296. [2] Ib. pp. 293, 294. [3] Ib. p. 55.

nor was the Church then split into several denominations. As an illustration, take the case which you yourself have given. "On a visit which 'the blessed Polycarp' made to Rome, many 'little discussions' arose between him and Anicetus, and especially the question respecting the different modes of observing the Paschal feast. Polycarp appealed to the practice of St John, and Anicetus to the example of those whom he had succeeded in the church of Rome, and who professed to follow St Paul. The conclusion was, that as the apostles had not been anxious for uniformity in these outward observances, a diversity of custom ought not to interfere with unity" (which we have seen means, should not lead to separate denominations). "'They did not,' says Irenæus, 'indulge a contentious spirit; for though Polycarp could not persuade Anicetus, nor Anicetus Polycarp, they partook of the communion together; and, in the church, Anicetus gave place to Polycarp in the administration of the eucharist, by way of honouring him; and they parted in charity; and the whole Church maintained peace, whether observing the same rite or not.'"[1] When Protestants shall go and do likewise, their *protest* will be worthy of consideration.

Lord Herbert.—Moreover, there is a marked difference between "thinking alike on all points," and "contradicting each other on a point of importance." This distinction is, constantly and perversely (shall I say?) overlooked.

Melancthon.—"May not *denominational Christianity*, maintained with charity, be regarded as a certain species of Christian friendship? Friendship is founded on something more than even grand common principles; it in-

[1] Schism, pp. 84, 85.

volves a somewhat minute peculiarity of tastes—similar characteristic predilections and objects of pursuit. Let Christian denominations, therefore, be conceived of under the idea of societies of private friendship, selected from the universal Church, and founded on coincidence in minor opinions and practices, chiefly regarding external points. Now since but few, comparatively, can meet for public worship under the same roof, there must, of necessity, be different places of assembly. May not Christians, then, avail themselves of this unavoidable separation, and associate together, according to similarity of sentiments and views;—still preserving unity of spirit; union of effort in doing good; and, to the utmost limit allowed by conscience, occasional interchange and union in worship and communion? Christians *must* worship locally *apart*;—why may they not *so* worship, as that the consciences of all may be satisfied—that all may 'be fully persuaded in their own minds'—that all may be 'edified?' Let all enjoy this privilege of predilection and selection—yet let all be *one*. Let their union, in all other respects, be as great as possible—unity of heart being entire. On what just principles can any one here discern *schism?*[1]

Lord Herbert.—If separation be *in itself an evil*, as you have admitted, this mode of reasoning is essentially jesuitical. To represent denominationalism, in one place, as undesirable, as needing to be restrained as much as possible, as possessing "redeeming circumstances,"[2] and so forth, and in another place to plead its cause under the sacred name of *private friendship*, is a specimen of tergi-

[1] Schism, pp. 305, 306. [2] Ib. p. 307.

versation, worthy only of what you call 'the apostate church.' Inasmuch as denominationalism institutes a *religious distinction* between those who are, or ought to be, religiously one, and inasmuch as the force of the illegitimate distinction proves stronger than the legitimate bond of unity and love, it ought rather to be designated a species of Christian caste.

Bellarmine.—It has been shewn that it is impossible to preserve denominationalism, and at the same time "union of effort in doing good." "Union of effort in doing good" being infringed and impaired, "unity of spirit" will necessarily be marred, if not broken. The conscience which allows and sanctions "occasional interchange and union in worship and communion," and forbids common and usual interchange and union in religious services, will require an *indulgence* of some sort or other. When you go the extreme length of maintaining that denominationalism exists, "that the consciences of all may be satisfied," we shall reply in your own words: "Let it not be forgotten that the law of Christ is paramount to all human rubrics, canons, articles, creeds, confessions, or church covenants whatever, and that this law is the law of LOVE. If any conventional enactments are obstacles to *its* exercise, it is surely high time for us to pause, and to revise our system; to remember that we ought to obey God rather than men; and to cast this Achan from our camp! Are we living in the violation of the *grand precept* of the Christian code, on the plea of subjection to certain human regulations?—what is this short of treason against the Head of the Church? Will such a plea avail, another day, in arrest of judgment for the crime of agreeing to annul the laws of

Christ? If we have, by any means, really brought ourselves under what we feel to be obligations, habitually to disregard the great fundamental principle of Christ's kingdom; the sooner we release ourselves from this thraldom the better—cost us what it may."[1] There, especially in the last sentence, you clearly point out the peril of displeasing God to "satisfy conscience!"

Melancthon.—"It is an apostolic injunction, that all things are to be 'done decently and in order.' If, therefore, Christians *must* differ as to modes of worship and government; and if they have no right from Christ to decide these points for each other;—it becomes necessary that those who concur in believing certain practices to be most agreeable to the will of God, should be at liberty to adopt them, without imposing them on their fellow Christians: for, since different rites and forms cannot co-exist, it is thus, alone, that order, and edification, and Christian freedom, can be maintained."[2]

Lord Herbert.—Necessity is a common and convenient, but inconclusive plea. Why *must* Christians differ as to modes of worship and government? If your Master *has* given directions, why can you not agree as to their meaning?—and if He has given no directions, why cannot the minority yield to the major part? Again, though you profess that you "have no right from Christ to decide these points for each other," there is no denomination that has not assumed this right, as was formerly shown. In making some of these points denominational peculiarities, or, which is the same thing, terms of ordinary communion, you not only adopt them, but "impose them on your fel-

[1] Schism, p. 412. [2] Ib. p. 308.

low-Christians," on pain of spiritual deprivation.—(See Dialogue II. Sect. II.)

Bellarmine.—It is, indeed, undeniable that "different rites and forms cannot co-exist," and if it were as undeniable that "Christians *must* differ" as to these, then "order" would be truly, what Protestants have misrepresented it to be, disorder, and "edification" would be turned into perversion, and "freedom" into license.

Melancthon.—"Until it be shown that modes, and forms, and church order, are, in Scripture, put on a level with the great doctrines and precepts of the gospel, every one must, on these points, be left at liberty to follow his own course, without being supposed, for so doing, to have forfeited the affections of his fellow-Christians. If this liberty involve schism in one party, it must do so in another, and in all. Every denomination must be guilty of as many schisms, as there are denominations beside itself; and the whole Protestant Church is one mass of schisms. This can be denied, only on the principle of a clear divine prescription, or a divinely delegated authority. To separate from a church *so* sanctioned, would doubtless be nothing short of rebellion against Christ. But where is this prescription?—where are the credentials of this authority?"

Bellarmine.—In the holy Catholic Church, of course.

Lord Herbert.—Those who can believe that, may. But there is another mode by which the Protestant Church may be, as surely, proven to be "one mass of schisms." It needs no words to show this, on the supposition that "modes, and forms, and church order," are really *enjoined in the Bible,* even though they are not put "on a level with," what you style, "the great doctrines and

precepts of the gospel." On the other supposition, that "modes, and forms, and church order," are *not* enjoined in your Scriptures, it seems to me to be demonstrable that such things should not be the occasion of erecting separate denominations, but ought to be points of forbearance in this sense, that one man should practically yield to another; for in no other conceivable way can unity be preserved in regard to such matters. The Protestant community has scarcely ever acted thus, and the consequence is, that it is in a shamefully schismatic condition—"one mass of schisms."

Theophilus.—It is a very common, but false notion. that because schism does not necessarily involve separation, therefore separation does not necessarily involve schism. The guilt of deception does not necessarily involve the uttering of a lie with the lips; but it would be a most absurd inference from this to assert, that the uttering of a lie with the lips does not necessarily involve deception. We have found nothing that has been hitherto advanced of sufficient force to set aside the opinion, that at first sight seems to be the correct one, that, if the Church of Christ is required and expected to be at one with itself, separation unavoidably brings home the charge of schism to one or other of the separating parties. It follows from this obvious and fundamental position, that when one congregation, or several, in an associated capacity, claim and profess to be *a part* of the one true catholic Church, this claim and profession involve the responsibility, not only of watching over the character of the members of the association, but also of abstaining from imposing any unscriptural terms of communion. If such an association

shall so abstain, no Christian can have a good and valid reason for separating from it. If it shall not so abstain, but shall impose any illegitimate terms of communion, *ipso facto* it becomes schismatical. If such a schismatical association shall arrogate to itself the character of the true Church, and charge all besides itself as schismatics, a course which has been often pursued, a double criminality is incurred. On the other hand, *if* an association be indeed a part of the true Church, and act consistently, then separatists from her are indeed schismatics, and she is called upon to assert her rightful claim.

If this view of the case be correct, then it follows, notwithstanding the many weighty considerations that may be advanced to palliate or disguise the actual state of the Churches of the Reformation, that they are in a very culpable and dangerous position. Making every reasonable allowance for the plea of conscientious differences, and redeeming circumstances, and healthful rivalry, and the apologue of private friendship, and so forth, it is a sad conclusion to which we are forced, that the Protestant community is in her present shattered and enfeebled state through carelessness and folly. The more sorrowfully, however, any one feels at the contemplation of our melancholy position, the more readily should he join any proper effort towards effecting an amelioration. How anxious and diligent should we be to learn what are the causes which have produced or occasioned this backsliding of the disciples of Christ, and to discover and apply such remedies as may prove effectual in healing the dissensions of Israel. May the Lord himself interpose with a mighty hand to turn back the captivity of his people, by promot-

ing the purity, and hastening the union of "the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood!"

III.—*Church Government.*

Melancthon.—"It is sufficient to shew that NO ONE FORM OF GOVERNMENT OUGHT TO BE INSISTED ON, TO THE EXTENT OF MAKING IT ESSENTIAL TO THE VISIBLE UNITY OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST; nor should we refuse to maintain a catholic and open union with Christians who, we have reason to believe, conscientiously adhere to other modes."[1]

Bellarmine.—The question of church government seems to be of such a nature, that you cannot insist upon it at all, unless you make it essential to the visible unity of the Church. If Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents would allow the question to be decided practically by a majority of votes, each man must be prepared to yield his own opinions, so far as their practical application goes at least; but if all parties will not do this, but *insist* upon each having a form of government according to his own notion, then the *visible union* of the Church *must* be broken, as we see it is broken in the hands of Protestants. To talk of "a catholic and open union" among those who are thus proved to be schismatics, is like talking of honour among a band of thieves!

Lord Herbert.—If the plea of "conscience" be held valid in defence of schism, that same plea must be admitted on behalf of unbelief.

[1] Schism, p. 87.

Melancthon.—" It is not necessary that we should hold all kinds of church government to be equally agreeable to the New Testament. Even if we allow that one form may be more readily deduced from Scripture than another, and that the value of a system does not consist entirely in the *manner of its administration*, yet, if the Divine Word have not treated the subject of church government in such a way as to render agreement on this point *essential* (like the faith and morals of the gospel), no mere *human* power has a right to make it so." [1]

Lord Herbert.—Do you mean that two, or more, forms of church government may be " readily deduced from Scripture," and that one is only " *more* readily" deduced than another? Do you believe that your Scriptures can be said, in any valid and intelligible sense, to sanction and approve *two* distinct forms of government? And if there be one form of church government readily deducible from the Bible, to tell us that agreement in that form thus sanctioned and supported by divine authority, as you believe, is *not essential*, is to fall into the very impiety which you so frequently charge against us.

Bellarmine.—And if there be *no* form of government sanctioned in the Bible, then every denomination which makes its own form a term of communion (and every existing denomination does habitually do so, with few exceptions, if any), assumes an authority which belongs to " no mere *human* power."

Melancthon.—" Admit that there might be less diversity on this subject among Christians, if all were diligent and eager in studying it as related to the divine will, and with

[1] Schism, p. 58.

less of prejudice, or passion, or party-feeling, or worldly motive; still, can we suppose that uniformity in the framework of church government was intended by Christ to be an indispensable element of visible unity? Had this been his design, surely the whole order of the Christian sanctuary would have been laid down in the New Testament, with scarcely less exactness than the structure of the tabernacle, the functions of its officers, and the entire detail of its services, were prescribed in the Levitical law." [1]

Bellarmine.—This inference will hold good only on the supposition that men were always to continue "under tutors and governors," "under a schoolmaster," even after faith was come.

Lord Herbert.—The inference is nugatory; for what can be plainer than this principle, which I am almost ashamed to be called upon to repeat so frequently, namely, that, so far as your professed divine authority does extend, to that extent you Christians ought to be at one, and when you feel yourselves free from that authority, you ought peaceably to yield to one another?

Theophilus.—Denominationalists seem to have no escape from this dilemma. Their inconsistency is sadly intensified, when we are told that "it will be admitted by every denomination of Christians that they themselves have, more or less, adopted regulations for which no precise parallel can be found in Scripture. The utmost that can often be contended for is, that the practice pursued is *useful*, and that, in the judgment of those who follow it, it is *not inconsistent* with any divine law or precedent." [2] It is bad enough to plead divine authority for something des-

[1] Schism, pp. 88, 89. [2] Ib. pp. 86, 87.

titute of that authority, and under that plea make it a term of communion, or a denominational peculiarity. For nothing can be a denominational peculiarity or characteristic, unless it be a term of communion in that denomination. How much worse is it to constitute anything a denominational term of communion, without even professing to believe, or rather professing to disbelieve, that it is directly or positively enjoined in the Holy Scriptures!! This extravagance culminates to its apex, if it be true that "no one party have been entirely unanimous as to the principles on which they found their own practices." [1]

Melancthon.—If any one maintain that any form whatever is *essential* to the Church, our reply is this:—"God hath instituted no one form of church government as necessary." [2] And if it be said that the Church "without a form" "is not a complete Church," [3] that were to adopt the monstrous conclusion, that "God made or instituted no such thing as a complete Church." [4] How, then, can it be "any great matter to separate from a church form which God never made?" [5] On the assumption, therefore, that no form of church government is clearly and authoritatively instituted in the New Testament, *no* form can be *essential*, except on the supposition that "Christ has given power to man to frame new terms of union and communion." [6]

Bellarmine.—You again assume, what certainly needs proof, and what you have not attempted to prove or explain, that the Church may exist, and *be visible*, without any form of government whatever! This is a point I can-

[1] Schism, p. 88. [2] Ib. p. 285. [3] Ib. p. 285.
[4] Schism, p. 285. [5] Ib. p. 286. [6] Ib. p. 286.

not possibly understand. And till you effectually remove this difficulty, the monstrous conclusion that "God has not instituted a complete Church" fixes itself on every one who maintains, like yourself, that God has not instituted a form of government. Your argument appears to me to be highly ludicrous; it is this:—No form is enjoined by Christ, therefore none is needful or essential, and therefore every Christian, or every party, may adopt which he chooses, and thereby split the Church into a thousand fragments!

Theophilus.—But to go without any form of government is impracticable; and if the Lord Jesus had left no provision for church government, the Church, as instituted by him, would certainly have been incomplete. This provision does not necessarily consist in a well-defined platform of externals. Has not the Church power to determine its own outward form? To suppose that Christ has instituted his Church without any form, and, therefore, incomplete, because he has not authoritatively commanded some special form in all its details, is to overlook a most palpable and important consideration. In every well regulated society, there arise necessarily various distinctions of office. There cannot be order, unless some be superior and some subordinate. The freedom of the Christian community does not imply perfect sameness of function, or unbending equality of position, among all its members. Whatever external form the Church may be supposed to assume, its peace will inevitably be broken by insubordination to lawful authority, legitimately exercised. Wilful inattention to the proprieties of the position which any one may occupy may readily enough lead to schism. Is he not, therefore, to be

regarded as a schismatic, who in the Church of Christ refuses duly to "obey them that have the rule?" If these remarks be true, the Church has power and authority to settle such necessary things as her own external forms, if these have been left undetermined by the Master, and to vary them, from time to time, with changing circumstances; and it appears to be schism to deny or dispute the lawful exercise of her lawful authority, as it is unquestionably schismatical to exercise that authority unlawfully.

Melancthon.—"Episcopalians are now the only British Protestants, so far as we are aware, who are found formally maintaining that those who differ from them in church government are 'schismatics.' For though Presbyterians see, in *their own* form, that brotherly equality of ministers, which they regard as the image of the Apostolic Church, while as yet '*presbyters*' and '*bishops*' were but different names for the same office; and Congregationalists hold sacred what *they* deem the rights and discipline of the Christian assembly, according to apostolic precept and example; yet no Christians belonging to either of these communities, or to those of the Wesleyans, or the Friends, discover a disposition to pronounce other Christian bodies differing from them in church government 'schismatics,' and 'cut off from the Church of Christ.' The charge of '*schism*' is not heard to sound, either from the Kirk or the Secession, from the Union or the Conference, or the Yearly Meeting, or even from the Synod of the Episcopal Moravians; it proceeds from the Established Episcopal Church alone."[1]

[1] Schism, pp. 290, 291.

Theophilus.—Granting this representation to be accurate in point of fact, it is of the utmost importance to understand what is the legitimate and valid inference to be drawn. The Established Episcopal Church has added, or has not added, terms of communion of her own to those enjoined by Christ. If she has *not*, the claim she makes is reasonable and scriptural and just. If she *has* made such additions, her claim savours rankly of Popery. As to the other denominations, either they have made, or they have not made, additions to the Bible-sanctioned terms of communion. If they have done so, there is too good an excuse for them in abandoning this claim; and they have work before them to relieve themselves of their unscriptural burdens. If there be any denomination which has made *no* additions, then they are the true Church; and to draw back in asserting their rightful claim, looks as if they were ashamed of the *Truth*, and savours strongly of infidelity. If the Presbyterian form be, indeed, "the image of the apostolic Church," and divinely sanctioned, then to separate from it *is* schism; if that form be not all this, why should any Christian maintain that it is? If "the rights and discipline of the Christian assembly, according to apostolic precept and example," be, indeed, what the Congregationalists *deem* them to be, then the Congregationalists are bound to treat those who oppose them on these rights and that discipline, as schismatics; but if Congregationalists deem these things to be what they *are not*, this deeming of theirs is a very fountain-head of schism.

IV.—*The Lord's Supper.*

Melancthon.—"In some periods and sections of the Church, attempts have been made to blend Christians into one body by enforcing universally the same discipline, government, and ceremonies of worship. This was mistaking uniformity for union. This our Lord himself forbore; and forbore as inconsistent with the universal design of his new economy. For, while a minute and unbending ritual, like that of the Jewish, is admirably adapted to *distinguish* a people from the rest of the world, the system that proposes to *unite* all nations in a common brotherhood, should possess the simplicity and self-adjusting nature of a general principle." [1]

Theophilus.—Do you not see that the principle of denominationalism, if it involve any principle at all, is very far from being of a simple and self-adjusting nature? If every man must stickle for his *ism*, so that it shall become the watchword of a party, does he not, in doing so, proceed on the assumption that that same *ism* is to become universal? Whereas, if his peculiarity of government or worship is not to distinguish the catholic Church, for that very reason it ought not to occasion a denominational division among Christians. What, now, is your simple and self-adjusting principle?

Melancthon.—"'*By this*,' said Christ, 'shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another,'—intimating that, while other signs might identify them as belonging to a party, this alone would mark

[1] Union, p. 60.

them out as belonging to him, and would soon come to be recognised as a leading feature in the great Christian family." [1]

Lord Herbert.—Very good. But can this brotherly love exist without manifesting itself in outward acts?

Melancthon.—By no means. "This love will necessarily discover itself in appropriate acts and expressions; and thus the union will be *made visible to the world.*" [2]

Bellarmine.—Pray, what are some of those appropriate acts and expressions?

Melancthon.—"One of these visible expressions of love to each other, the Head of the Church has himself specifically appointed in the ordinance of 'the Lord's Supper.' Though this, indeed, is not, as some seem to imagine, the whole of Christian fellowship, it is a most vital and important branch of it; and though it denotes also communion with God, it does not the less imply communion with each other." [3]

Lord Herbert.—Let me now ask you this simple and decisive question: Do Christians observe the Lord's Supper as a mark of their mutual affection, or as a badge of their denominational divisions?

Bellarmine.—It cannot for a moment be denied, that whatever Protestants may *say* about observing it as a mark of their common Christian discipleship, in point of *fact* it has become in their hands a badge of party. For is it not self-evident that, as soon as any denomination ceases to treat its specialties as terms of communion, it will cease to be a distinct denomination?

Melancthon.—There are several denominations that do

[1] Union, p. 72. [2] Ib. p. 224. [3] Ib. p. 224.

not by any means require, from every one who is admissible to their communion table, a full and positive profession of belief in all that is held to be distinctive of these denominations respectively.

Bellarmine.—But such denominations, as you now refer to, deprive their ordinary members of all power and influence in regulating the affairs of the denomination, or limit the exercise of their power to the election of office-bearers, who must be pledged by solemn oath to uphold the denomination's peculiarities. Since, then, the members can receive the eucharistic elements *only* at the hands of such office-bearers, the observance of this ordinance becomes most indubitably, even though we admit it to be indirectly, a signet and criterion of sect. The moment that the eucharistic board of any party shall become as free and open, truly and as a matter of fact, to those who reject its peculiarities as to those who espouse them; or, in other words, whenever all the members of a denomination—and no one is surely regarded as a member who often neglects to be present at the observance of the communion—are treated *on equal terms in every matter*, whether or not they can "frame to pronounce Shibboleth right," that moment its denominational existence is doomed to extinction.

Melancthon.—"However we may deplore what we may deem unscriptural in the constitution and usages of other churches, *we should never contemplate their conformity to* OUR *model without much self-distrust.*" [1]

Lord Herbert.—If it be consistent with Christianity to profess and promulgate and practise "a model" which

[1] Union, p. 236.

you "*distrust*," such proceeding is not sanctioned by our reason or our conscience, depraved as you so frequently represent them to be.

Bellarmine.—The condition of Protestants is truly deplorable. They *deem* this and the other thing to be *un*scriptural, but cannot feel sure that they are not mistaken.

Melancthon.—"Nor would we advocate the formation of *a new denomination*—including Christians of various persuasions—*as a means of promoting union.* As far as such a step may be the *result* of mutual love, it would assuredly occasion joy among the angels in the presence of God. But if adopted formally, as an *experiment* or *a means*, it would want the cordiality—the central fire of love—which would be necessary to fuse the parties into one consolidated whole, and to convince the world that they were one in more than in name." [1]

Lord Herbert.—Then is it most obvious that you *do* advocate the formation of a new and universal denomination. You plead for love, mutual love, among Christians; and you look forward to the institution of *one* denomination as the result of this love.

Bellarmine.—Consequently, when this *one* Protestant denomination shall emerge upon the scene, we shall admit that the observance of the Lord's Supper is a pledge and symbol of their union and mutual affection as co-religionists. But till that improbable supposition be realised, we shall hold, that so abandoned are these Protestant heretics, that they have been left to the awful criminality of turning the table of the Lord itself into a public voucher and exponent of their mutual distance and alienation.

[1] Union, pp. 238, 239.

Melancthon.—"Never does the Christian Church appear more distinctly in its proper character as the family of God, than when it is observing this ordinance."[1]

Lord Herbert.—We may well ask, in the language of the author who has been quoted: "Is it from this family feast that the children are to be excluded?"[2] Excluded some of them must be, so long as two denominations exist in which the members recognise each other as brother Christians.

Bellarmine.—"This ordinance," to use the words of the same writer, "is (or should we not rather say *ought to be*) an epitome of that heavenly multitude, in which 'all nations, tribes, and tongues,' breathe the same spirit, and appear in the same character—that of redeemed sinners."[3] Alas! as it is commonly observed amongst Protestants, it not only comes far short of this conception, but even traverses and burlesques it. For the severe reproof which follows is most plainly applicable to every one who attempts to defend the propriety or reasonableness of two or more denominations of Christians. "Is it the harmony of such a scene that we would mar by the enforcement of our peculiarities? Shall the great symbol of our common Christianity be degraded into the badge and criterion of a party? Shall the rite which more than any other is adapted to cement mutual attachment, and which is in a great measure appointed for that purpose, be fixed upon as the line of demarcation to separate and disjoin the followers of Christ?"[4] There is, indeed, no other possible way in which Christ's followers, or those who possess the slightest pretence to that honourable appellation, can

[1] Union, p. 225. [2] Ib. ib. [3] Ib. ib. [4] Ib. ib.

manage to effect a disjunction and separation from each other than by some visible perversion of that most solemn and hallowed rite. God has thus hedged up the way of his people to preserve their unity; alas, for those who have broken through that hedge. The following statement from your own pen is enough to remove all ambiguity and uncertainty from this point. "A union which should propose to omit the communion of Christians, or of churches, in this ordinance, would be radically defective and unscriptural; and the church which intentionally places an obstacle in the way of such communion, or knowingly allows it to remain, is obviously opposing the will of God."[1]

Theophilus.—The most elementary and fundamental notion involved in Christian union, is, as it appears to us, the communion of *Christians* in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. To talk of the communion of *churches* in this ordinance seems like a solecism in religion. For there should not be *two* churches till some natural necessity arise to prevent *all* that are Christians from communicating at once and together. When we find associations, which style themselves churches, *occasionally* and with much ado *communicating*, and *habitually refusing* to communicate with each other in this ordinance, what is this but to seal and publish their own inconsistency? It may even well be questioned, whether any two churches of different denominations have ever, *as churches*, communicated with each other. It does appear to us to be plain, as any thing well can be, that when a denomination institutes terms of communion not sanctioned by Holy Scripture, and there

[1] Union, pp. 225, 226.

cannot be *two* denominations unless one of them do so, it is placing an obstacle, if not "*intentionally*," yet *really*, in the way of the communion of saints, and "is obviously opposing the will of God." The same guilt attaches to every denomination which allows such an obstacle to remain.

Melancthon.—"The removal of denominational distinctions, or the absorption of all sects by one, is by no means necessary to extinguish schism."[1]

Bellarmine.—It is for you to reconcile this statement with other sentiments to which you have given utterance. You do not deny that the termination of schism is in fact the very same thing substantially as the removal of those distinctions, or the emergence of *only one* Christian association. our arguments, at least, very frequently lead to this conclusion. For example, when you say, "The great Intercessor, when only a step from the cross, comprehending his people at a glance in all the nations of the earth, and all the ages of time, prays *that they all may be one*—incorporated in one body, animated by one spirit, united in that love which is the bond of perfectness:—that they may be one *as we are one, as thou Father art in me and I in thee*—closely, spiritually, indissolubly; how intimate and sacred the union of which the mysterious trinity in unity is the heavenly pattern:—that they may be *made perfect in one*, their oneness is necessary to their perfection. . . . . His cross, like the ark in the wilderness, is the centre around which his people are to encamp, so that they cannot separate into factions, or withdraw from each other, without retiring at the same time from

[1] Union, p. 100.

the presence of the cross."[1] In the very next page, you properly connect the visibility of this union with the observance of the eucharist. "The *one loaf*, and the *one cup*, of which all partake, however numerous, is an evidence and sign that there is but one body of which they are all members. So that as long as these ordinances are administered in His Church, our Lord is virtually calling on His people to be one."

Lord Herbert.—It seems to me beyond dispute, therefore, that to maintain the legitimate existence of different denominations, and, at the same time, the obligation of the members of these different denominations to cultivate Christian fellowship as far as their circumstances will allow, "makes that sacred spot which (as you have argued) should be the rallying point of all the faithful, the point of their repulsion and separation."[2]

Melancthon.—"The union which we advocate, so far from requiring the subjugation or absorption of any one section of the faithful, guarantees the integrity and security of each by seeking the fellowship of all."[3]

Lord Herbert.—But how can you hope to attain "*the fellowship of all*," except by removing and purging from every section in detail, whatever has a tendency to hinder or mar that universal fellowship? Is such a process of purgation and winnowing needed to any extent by the different sections of the Protestant community?

Melancthon.—Alas, it must be acknowledged, that "for thirteen or fourteen hundred years the Church hath been gradually growing a multiform, mangled, shattered, and most deformed thing; broken and parceled into nobody

[1] Union, pp. 20, 21. [2] Ib. p. 119. [3] Ib. p. x.

knows how many several sorts of communions. . . . Carnality hath become, and long been in it, a governing principle, and hath torn it into God knows how many fragments and parties; each of which will now be the Church, enclose itself within its own peculiar limits, and claim and appropriate to itself the rights and privileges which belong to the Christian Church in common." [1]

Lord Herbert.—Is it not manifest, then, that if "the sections of the faithful" be, as you have now conceded, "torn fragments," the "broken and parceled" portions of a whole, which you characterise as "a mangled, shattered, and most deformed thing," a vast deal of work in refitting, and chiseling, and clearing out will have to be executed before a stately and imposing temple can be raised from such ruins? How then can you, except by hoping to effect an impossibility, promise to "guarantee the *integrity and security* of each" party, while seeking, or *by* seeking, the union of the Church? It seems most obtrusively plain, taking the case on your own representation, that *by* seeking the fellowship of all, you seek the disintegration and dissolution of the sections of Protestantism as they at present exist. If you once begin the work of union on anything like an intelligent principle, or in a business-like way, you cannot stop but in "*the subjugation or* absorption" of all the sections into one. To disavow this intention, and plead for union, is to make much ado about nothing.

Melancthon.—"If we do not plead, that *Christians should be one in name*, it is not because we regard such oneness as unimportant, or as *ultimately* unattainable;

[1] Howe, quoted in Union, p. 171.

but because we believe that it will be among the latest triumphs, if not the very crowning act, of brotherly love. Whereas the unity which we would now inculcate seems more proximate, and would of itself be sufficient to render Christians, though still distinct in name, in substance one. What is of much more immediate importance, and more easily attainable, and more urgently enforced in Scripture, is, that *the union of Christians should be visible.* . . . Evidence must be given to the *senses* of men, that not merely in profession, but in heart and object, we are one. The fact should be too plain to be misunderstood; and too palpable to remain a secret." [1]

Bellarmine.—You formerly admitted, that "the Head of the Church has himself specifically appointed (for his people) in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper one *visible* expression of love to each other;" and that this is "a *most vital and important* branch of Christian fellowship." We have also seen that denominationalism does, practically and habitually, turn this ordinance into a badge of party. Now where is your authority for *dispensing with*, for an indefinite time, this "most vital and important branch of Christian fellowship?" You contend for *visible* union, and yet coolly allow one *visible expression of love, which the Head of the Church has himself specifically appointed*, not simply to fall into disuse, but actually to be perverted to a purpose exactly the reverse of that, for which it was ordained!!

Lord Herbert.—Besides, if to be *one in name*, or, in other words, to be emancipated from denominational nomenclature and narrowness, be, indeed, "important,

[1] Union, p. 230.

and ultimately attainable, and the very crowning act of brotherly love," and if evidence of union must be given to the *senses* of men, then will the *visible* union of Christians continue to be indistinct and questionable, and their brotherly love mutilated and doubtful, so long as denominations are perpetuated. For they most effectually prevent this union from being so "plain" as not "to be misunderstood," and so "palpable" as not "to remain a secret."

Theophilus.—Moreover, the union which the Bible enjoins is a thorough union in name and in everything else, or it is not. If the union which is compatible with denominational institutions, be *all* that the word of God commands, or that the Son of God expects, then let us cease to labour, or pray, or long for any fuller or nobler development of social Christianity. But if the *abolition of denominations* be truly involved in the Saviour's injunction addressed to his people *to be one*, let every disciple beware of tampering with that injunction, or attempting to palliate its transgression. Does the Scriptures leave us in doubt as to what the sin of schism precisely is?

Melancthon.—"Schism is an evil, *the existence of which is undeniable, and the degrees of which, in every age, are strictly definable.*"[1] "The law of Christ on the subject is so definite, that we can lay our finger, so to speak, on the very point where the sin of schism begins; and, by comparing the existing state of the Christian Church with the express requirements of that law, we can determine, with all the exactness of a chemical analysis, the places and the degrees in which it exists."[2]

Bellarmine.—Well, there cannot be the least difficulty

[1] Union, p. 2. [2] Ib. p. 3.

in telling us, whether denominational distinctions be schismatical or not. If they be *not*, avow it plainly; and assure us that your ecclesiastical patch-work, albeit it be not primitive or patristic, is normal and scriptural Christianity. But if your modern denominations *be* schisms, then how is it that Protestants do not blush, while they proclaim that the Bible, and the Bible *alone*, is their religion?

Lord Herbert.—Have you ever compared "the existing state of the Christian Church with the express requirements of the law of Christ" on this point?

Melancthon.—"Can any representation of the *internal* state of the Christian community be greatly exaggerated, when its *external* state is so rent and dismantled? Remember the all-pervading unity of affection which the Saviour required in his Church; contrast that oneness with its *actual* condition at this moment; and then say, whether the alarming degree, in which Christian union is wanting in the Church, would not justify the utmost fears concerning the absence of liberality and devotion also? What can we expect from a church whose members, instead of worshipping together in one spirit—laying all the fuel of its affections upon one altar—withdraw, and separate into parties, and erect each its distinct altar, one on Mount Gerizim, and another on Mount Zion—what, but that the fires on each should burn dimly? What can you expect from the man who loveth not his brother-christian whom he hath seen, but that he cannot love God whom he hath not seen?"[1]

Theophilus.—Such, alas, is too accurate a description

[1] Union, p. 5.

of the real state of matters at present; and the picture is all the more painful, since, as we have found, there can be no separation from a church without the guilt of schism being incurred by one party or the other. There cannot, in the very nature of the case, be distinct denominations, without each having its own "distinct altar;" and if it be a self-evident and scriptural principle, that "for the same reason that we combine as Christians to form a particular church, we should unite as churches and denominations,"[1] then there is no prospect of the heavenly fire burning brightly and purely on the altar of the Church, till our "distinct altars" have been laid in ruins, and the work of constructing a *common altar* has been heartily commenced.

If separation by itself involve not some of the essential evil of schism, then the Church of Christ is as well in a state of division as of union. Was it then a mere chance that our Lord and his apostles instituted one visibly united Church, and not so many distinct and rival societies like our Protestant denominations? Is sectarianism, if not an improvement on the original constitution of the Christian Church, a second edition thereof in all respects equal to the first? Is the prospect of the final union of the Church a dream of Utopia, or a matter of absolute indifference? Nay, is the Church, even now, sufficiently divided? If the division of the universal Church, as a whole, involve no damage and entail no disadvantage, why should the separation of any particular Christian community be feared as an evil, or felt as a calamity?

[1] Union, p. 226.

DIALOGUE IV.

ESSAYS ON CHRISTIAN UNION.

I.—*Dr Balmer's Essay.*

Theophilus.—It is now proposed to discuss some of the sentiments which are expressed in the volume of Essays, composed by ministers of different denominations, and published some few years ago.[1]

Melancthon.—I am somewhat at a loss to distinguish between your views and the plan which is based on "absolute uniformity of opinion and practice."

Theophilus.—*Some* such uniformity there must be, and the scheme which we have ventured to propound attempts, in something like a definite form, to settle *the limits* of that uniformity.

Melancthon.—"But there is no subject so likely to occasion a variety of sentiment as religion; for though its fundamental doctrines are comparatively few, and abundantly obvious, there is no subject which presents in its subordinate details such a multiplicity of intricate and difficult questions, none that has been so much perplexed by controversy, none more likely to awaken prejudice and

[1] London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co. 1845.

passion, and none for the investigation of which the human faculties labour under a stronger indisposition or inaptitude. Reasoning *a priori*, then, we might confidently have anticipated, that on many points in religion men would adopt various and even opposite sentiments."[1]

Lord Herbert.—Are you not entangled in the old fallacy of confounding *variety* and *opposition* of sentiment? If a question be "intricate and difficult," suspend your judgment; if it be "perplexed by controversy," wait till the mists shall have cleared away; and among those who shall act thus *opposition* of sentiment cannot arise. Do you mean to say, that the influence of "prejudice and passion," or the "inaptitude of the human faculties," will justify or excuse an *erroneous* judgment,—a denial of the truth? But what is your plan?

Melancthon.—"Its characteristic feature is forbearance; and the essence of it may be expressed in a single sentence. All true Christians ought to walk together in all things in which they are agreed; and as the points on which they differ, though some of them may be very important, cannot be essential to salvation, they ought to make these points matters of forbearance."[2]

Bellarmine.—Be so good as to tell me how I am to know, or how you distinguish, a "true Christian" from other men?

Melancthon.—A "true Christian" is the man in whom are found the things "essential to salvation."

Bellarmine.—What, then, are the things that are essential to salvation?

Melancthon.—"We may see the Divine wisdom in with-

[1] Balmer's Essay, p. 36. [2] Ib. p. 37.

holding what many are apt to desiderate a catalogue of necessary or essential truths."[1] But "all genuine Christians, as their very name implies, and has already been stated, have 'one faith.' There are certain truths in which they are united, truths which it is not necessary, and which it would not be wise to attempt accurately to enumerate."[2]

Bellarmine.—Your plan being thus, in its very statement, loose and undefined, the execution of it can be, and has been, nothing better than guess-work. For so long as every attempt at union must hinge upon these essential truths, and so long as the question, what are these essentials, is left unsettled, the whole business will be little better than a game at children's see-saw.

Melancthon.—We are not to be driven from our position by such a quibble. "The idea to be conveyed is, that while there are some facts and truths in Christianity which, in ordinary cases, must be known and believed in order to salvation, there are others which, though conducive to edification and comfort, are not thus essential; ignorance of which, or the misapprehension of which, is not incompatible with a state of grace. The distinction, when thus explained, seems so evident as to be altogether incontrovertible; and the denial of it will lead to consequences the most appalling."[3]

Bellarmine—We do not deny the correctness of this statement. But we beg to press the inquiry,—of what avail is this distinction in explaining the true principles of Christian union, if these essentials cannot be precisely specified, because they are *different* in different individual

[1] Balmer's Essay, p. 88. [2] Ib. p. 38. [3] Ib. p. 85.

men, and in different ages of the Church? Are they so, or are they not?

Melancthon.—"There may be truths, or views of truths, which are essential to one man and not to another, in consequence of the diversity of their means and privileges; and it is essential to the character of a Christian, to receive with docility every doctrine of Christ, and to aim at a cordial compliance with every requirement clearly perceived to be a commandment of Christ."[1]

Theophilus.—This admission explains the reason, why it is impossible to specify in detail essential truths, and at the same time shews, that it is of no avail to attempt to build the temple of Christian concord on the sole foundation of what are vaguely called essential doctrines, to the exclusion of what are styled non-essentials, though confessedly important.

Melancthon.—"Allowing that the distinction cannot be drawn with unerring precision, it will not follow, either that it is purely imaginary, or that the principle implied in it is one on which it would be uniformly impossible or unwarrantable to act. The colours of the rainbow run into each other, so that no human eye can determine with infallible accuracy where one ends and another begins. But does it follow from this, that we are unable to distinguish red from green, or that to make the distinction is of no practical utility? The night and the day are divided by the twilight, which partakes of the nature of both. But does it follow from this, that there is no difference between light and darkness, or that it would be as safe and agreeable for a man to walk in the night as in the

[1] Balmer's Essay, p. 87.

day? Something similar holds in religion. There are truths which, in reference to our powers of perception, occupy an intermediate position between those which are fundamental and those which are not; we know not whether to class them among the former or the latter. But there are others, with respect to which we feel no such perplexity, and with respect to which it is of high importance to make the distinction."[1]

Lord Herbert.—You surely do not intend to compare any truth, even the least important, or the farthest removed from the essential frontier, to the darkness of night! Besides, the distinction between red and green is in itself *in*variable, although the line of demarcation between them may, by the gradation of tints, be scarcely discernible; whereas the distinction to which it is compared, you have already admitted to be variable, inasmuch as what is essential to one man may be non-essential to his neighbour.

Bellarmine.—Hence of whatever "high importance" respect to this distinction may be, it can be of none in regard to the union of the Church. This will be more abundantly obvious, when it is considered that the very points with which Protestant divisions and sects are concerned are found in that "intermediate position between those which are fundamental and those which are not." The very scandal and condemnation of Protestantism is, that you "know not whether to class them among the former or the latter." If you class them among the latter, your separations are a disgrace; if among the former, you should treat each other as you treat me and my acquaintance here.

[1] Balmer's Essay, pp. 86, 87.

Melancthon.—Your dilemma misses the mark; we make these points "matters of forbearance," for this very reason, that they are "important," and yet "not essential to salvation." If they were essential to salvation, they could not be matters of forbearance, as being so highly important; if they were mere trifles, pure indifferences, there would be no occasion to forbear.

Lord Herbert.—Pray observe how you have changed your ground. Your first remark was that "to our powers of perception" certain truths occupied an intermediate position; that is, the truths themselves were undoubtedly fundamental, or not fundamental, but *we could not tell* which. It is plain, then, that in this state of ignorance you may easily enough treat a fundamental, as a non-fundamental, and a non-fundamental as if it were a genuine fundamental. If Christian union be harmony in fundamentals, in this state of ignorance it never can be realised. Your second assertion is, that there is, not simply to your perceptions, but in reality, an intermediate position. In this intermediate state you group certain denominational differences, and argue that because they *are* in this state, they are to be matters of forbearance. This last is based on a denial of your first assertion. You now assume that you *can* distinguish fundamentals, while before you pled that you could *not*.

Melancthon.—"The very persons who reprobate the distinction between those things in religion which are essential and those which are not, virtually recognise it, and act upon it. In admitting to the communion of the Church, these persons universally, or almost universally, demand, as a necessary qualification, what they are accus-

tomed to designate a competent measure of Christian knowledge. They assume, then, that there are things in Christianity necessary to be known, and things not thus necessary. Now, by what criterion do they ascertain that exact amount of knowledge which constitutes a competent measure?"[1]

Theophilus.—It has been already conceded that what is a competent measure to one individual is not so to another with superior advantages. This competent measure, then, depends upon circumstances, and is constantly varying with the progress of society. To determine it from age to age, as well as in regard to different members of the same community, requires wisdom in the office-bearers of the Church. But a variable quantity like this, can never become an element in the universal and unchanging principles on which Christian union must be based.

Melancthon.—Then the terms of communion are constantly changing, and so also must the terms of salvation be perpetually altering; if these two are identical, as has generally been supposed! See where your argument leads you.

Theophilus.—That the terms of Christian communion, *when viewed in their details*, have, as a matter of fact, been subject to modifications, there can be no doubt. Nor is there in this fact any impropriety, although we formerly saw that the terms of communion may be *so stated*, as to be invariable;—that is, the shifting details depend upon an unchanging principle by which they are determined. There is every reason to believe that polygamists and slaveholders were admissible to the communion of the

[1] Balmer's Essay, pp. 87, 88.

apostolic churches. He is a bold man who will assert, that now in our own country such ought still to be received. Allowing that the admission of such is a doubtful point in regard to some of the present infant churches of Pagan lands, is it so in regard to the future discipline of Christendom?

The facts now referred to seem to afford an instructive illustration of the views which we are advocating. The Apostles do not appear to have made it imperative on all those who gave evidences of regeneration, and were received into the bosom of the Church, to adopt immediately correct views on polygamy and slavery, and reduce these views to practice. At the same time the Apostles *did* teach, plainly enough, the truth in respect to these abominations. What, then, would the Apostles probably have done, if any member of the Church in their days had, not only quietly lived in the practice of slavery or polygamy, but had begun to vindicate their lawfulness and defend their consistency with the gospel? Such parties would, doubtless, have been rebuked, and their continued contumacy would have led to their expulsion. Hence we infer that the terms of Christian communion are twofold—positive and negative. First, a competent measure of scriptural knowledge and obedience, the amount of which must be determined in every individual case by a careful consideration of its special circumstances. Secondly, there must be the absence of contradiction and opposition to that amount of Christian knowledge which has been attained by other members of the Church.

As to the terms of salvation, if by salvation be meant justification, or a full and immediate forgiveness and con-

sequent peace with God, it is received by faith alone. "Believe, and thou shalt be saved." "He that believeth is not condemned." When a man's life is prolonged after accepting Christ as his Saviour, the terms of his final salvation, and heaven's eternal blessedness, are not only to believe in Christ, but also to reduce that belief to habitual practice,—to "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." [1]

The terms of communion with the Church on earth are not identical with the terms of everlasting salvation, for these reasons:—1. A man may be saved without having communicated. 2. The office-bearers of the Church may have no right to exclude an individual who yet may be far from salvation. 3. A genuine Christian may justly forfeit his church privileges for a time without forfeiting his final salvation.

Melancthon.—"Does it not savour of intolerable presumption and impiety to reject those whom God has received? If they are qualified for communion with Him, are they unfit for communion with us? Are we holier than He?" [2]

Theophilus.—Does God not chasten his backsliding people without casting them off for ever? Did not Paul call upon the Corinthian Church "to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus?"

Melancthon.—According to the principles which you are advocating, there is no occasion for the exercise of *forbearance* at all. "Intellectual errors and infirmities seem to be the most proper of all objects of forbearance.

[1] Heb. iii. 6. [2] Balmer's Essay, p. 45.

. . . This forbearance is to be exercised not only in reference to things allowed on both sides to be indifferent, (for this scarcely deserves the name of forbearance), but in reference to opinions deemed to be unscriptural, and to practices considered to be wrong, provided these opinions and practices are not thought incompatible with a state of grace and salvation." [1]

Bellarmine.—But *what sort* of forbearance ought to be extended to the opinions and practices that have just been specified?

Melancthon.—" Not but that we are to use assiduously all legitimate means to reclaim our Christian brethren from their errors, and to induce them to relinquish practices which to us seem sinful; but that we are not to eject them from the Church, or to exclude them from our private intercourse or our fraternal love. If they 'hold the head,' they cannot be chargeable with vital or essential error; and, though the points in which they agree with us may be few in number, they must be greater far in magnitude and importance than the particulars, however numerous, in which they differ from us. If, then, we separate from them, or compel them to separate from us, by making our differences terms of communion, we are guilty of schism—of a causeless and unwarrantable rupture in the Saviour's mystical body. 'When the lovers of Christ,' says a late excellent author, Dr Lawson, who will not now be suspected of unscriptural laxity, 'When the lovers of Christ cannot sit down at the same holy table, the blame of schism must rest with those whose sentiments or behaviour is the cause why they cannot do it.' " [2]

[1] Balmer's Essay, p. 50. [2] Ib. p. 51.

Lord Herbert.—It is an irrefragable inference from what you have now advanced, that there cannot be two denominations of Christians without one of them at least being guilty of schism.

Bellarmine.—There is another inference equally irrefragable, which is too much for Protestantism. If those *only* who are "chargeable with vital or essential error" may be legitimately excluded from the Church, then it follows not only that there ought to be but one Church, but also that out of that one Church there can be no salvation. When you assume that the terms of church communion and the terms of eternal life ought to be precisely the same, you return to a principle against which you have often *protested*. When you contend that it is unlawful to exclude a man from the Church, except for opinions so erroneous, and practices so flagrantly wrong, as to be incompatible with salvation, you not only outlaw the various self-styled evangelical denominations, but you also identify, as we do, schism and heresy, visiting both with the heaviest woe. If any denomination has the boldness to change the divinely-instituted terms of communion, *inasmuch as that is equivalent to changing the terms of salvation*, as we believe, and as you have now confessed, its guilt is, not schism in the diluted and Protestant sense of the word, but schism in the proper sense of the word, as determined by the holy Catholic Church, even damnable heresy and profanity.

Melancthon.—"In the present divided state of opinion, a complete amalgamation of religious parties is not to be expected; the diversity of sentiment which exists respecting various questions of ecclesiastical order and discipline

necessitates the continuance of separate, though not hostile, associations." [1]

Lord Herbert.—I perceive how certain diversity of sentiment *necessitates* separate associations; but what, I should like to know, *necessitates* such diversity of sentiment?

Melancthon.—Christians may be forced to separate, "not from caprice or jealousy, but with reluctance and grief, and only in obedience to the high and peremptory requirements of principle and conscience." [2]

Lord Herbert.—Is separation forbidden by Him whom you call your Lord and Master?

Melancthon.—Most certainly. "When the question is put, 'Is Christ divided?' it is assumed that discord or separation among his followers are things incongruous and monstrous, as well as criminal." [3]

Lord Herbert.—Well, then, your Bible commands a moral impossibility, if in any case separation be, on both sides, "in obedience to the high and peremptory requirements of principle and conscience;" and, moreover, on the accomplishment of that moral impossibility is suspended your expected conversion of the world!

Bellarmine.—But, perhaps, your motto is, "Co-operation without incorporation," the half-way house of a proud penitent Protestantism.

Melancthon.—No; my motto is, "Co-operation immediately, with a view to incorporation hereafter." [4] The former has a natural tendency to lead to the latter. And "natural tendency would infallibly be reinforced by supernatural influence. Christians would then occupy that posi-

[1] Balmer's Essay, p. 93.
[2] Ib. p. 77.
[3] Balmer's Essay, pp. 23, 24.
[4] Ib. p. 73.

tion, in which, if Scripture be true, the misapprehensions which divide them would be dissipated by divine illumination. They would be complying with the precept which enjoins them, 'Whereto they have already attained to walk by the same rule, to mind the same thing;' and 'the God of love and peace' would not be tardy to fulfil the promise of 'revealing to them the things about which they were variously-minded.'" [1]

Lord Herbert.—The alleged necessity for such diversity of sentiment as necessitates separation, has then completely disappeared like a morning cloud! You seem to me to profess contradictories; which of them do you really believe?

Melancthon.—"It may be asked, whether it would be requisite for the various sections into which the Church is divided to resolve themselves into their integral elements, and to attempt the formation of one vast community, comprehending the good of every name and every sect? Supposing it practicable, would it be desirable to demolish all existing Christian structures, that out of their ruins might be reared one spacious and magnificent temple—to throw all our present churches into a crucible, as it were, in which they may be fused and purified, and out of which they will come forth consolidated into one form of surpassing beauty and loveliness? To this question it may be answered, that nothing so extravagant is contemplated for a moment.[2]

Lord Herbert.—Then are you already false to the maxim which you recently adopted: "Co-operation immediately, with a view to incorporation hereafter." All

[1] Balmer's Essay, p. 79. [2] Ib. p. 66.

the extravagance from which you shrink is involved in *incorporation.* Besides, you have acknowledged that separation is "monstrous, as well as criminal;" that the Bible frequently and strongly condemns it; and that there is no necessity for its prolongation. "If the principle be a scriptural one," to use your own words, "the sooner it is adopted the better; nor can the adoption of it be postponed for a year or a month, but guilt must attach to those who cause the delay."[1]

Bellarmine.—It appears to me that the difficulties in the way of effecting anything like a habitual or systematic co-operation and intercommunion among different denominations, are not much less formidable than incorporation itself. If co-operation, on your principle of the right of private judgment, is to be more than a mere name, you must have some standard or confession, conformity to which will be the condition of admittance to co-operation. A similar remark applies to intercommunion, as you have yourself clearly stated. "Much as intercommunion among all Christians is to be desired, it is not desirable that intercommunion among all Christian denominations should be commenced, unless they first agree on the substance, at least, of a common system of discipline to be fearlessly and scrupulously enforced."[2] If, then, different denominations cannot attain co-operation and intercommunion, "*unless they first agree on the substance, at least, of a common system of discipline,*" *and also of a common system of belief,* it does not appear that more is needed to lay the foundations of incorporation itself. The latter, therefore, seems to be as easy and likely as the former. But we believe the fact

[1] Balmer's Essay, p. 74. [2] Ib. p. 99.

to be, that Protestantism will wrangle itself to death, before it can attain either the one or the other.

Theophilus.—That denominational incorporation is an immediate duty, is an assertion which will startle thousands. Let all who are disposed to regard the assertion as extravagant, weigh well the arguments which have been advanced in its support, and also the following sentiments:—"Such are the fulness and riches of Scripture, that there are many important principles in it—some of them probably at no great distance from the surface—which remain yet to be discovered; and such is the weakness of the human mind, and such its inaptitude to discern spiritual things, that even the wisest and best of men labour under much ignorance and many misapprehensions. It is, then, eminently probable, that there are opinions entertained, and practices followed by Christians, and by Christian churches in the present age, which, at no distant period, will be viewed with emotions of wonder and sorrow, similar to those with which we survey the former apathy of the Protestant churches to the spiritual miseries of heathen nations." [1]

Nor need any one be alarmed at the thought of a universal confederacy, whose power shall be concentrated in an individual head, or in an aristocratic conclave. This is no more implied in the incorporation of several congregations into one Christian community, than it is implied in the incorporation of several individuals into one church or congregation. If the formation of one Christian assembly does not lay the foundation of spiritual despotism, neither will the abolition of sects and denominations do so. By

[1] Balmer's Essay, p. 81.

enrolling ourselves as members of a Christian congregation, we do not surrender our own liberty, nor endanger that of the world; we only improve the one and promote the other.

The conditions of church-membership, we have seen, are, first, positive agreement with the church in some of the leading doctrines of the gospel, with the absence of contradiction on any truth held by the church; secondly, submission to the majority in cases of practical necessity and probability, with habitual obedience to the truth professed. Supposing these principles or conditions adhered to on both sides, what is *the authority* which the church-meeting, or session of the congregation, exercises over the church member? Each party has certain functions to perform, and to watch over the other to see that these functions are performed. If either party espouses and advocates error, schism will be the result, or a spiritual declension and relapse worse than schism. So will it always be, whenever profession and practice are at variance, either among the office-bearers or the members. When all are doing their duty, there will be no occasion for the exercise of authority; and even when authority is exercised, it is only *the authority of truth.* If ecclesiastical authority be ever anything else than *the authority of truth,* clearly and manifestly so, the church is then degenerate. This authority, consequently, will carefully abstain from interfering with petty details. The church-meeting or session should never condescend to notice the conduct of a particular member, unless that conduct refer to some important matter in which the character and well-being of the church itself are plainly concerned. The office-bearers of

a congregation have nothing to do with the colour of a man's coat, or the construction of his house, or the journeys which he may make, or the books which he may buy. In like manner, when a single congregation becomes a member of a large Christian corporation, the authority of that corporation in primary matters, or those of duty and faith, ought to be nothing else than the authority of manifest truth, to which each congregation cheerfully bows. In secondary matters, or matters of probable knowledge, the authority of the incorporated or united churches should not be extended to the details of congregational worship or management. This were indeed to confound uniformity with union. It should interfere in those congregational matters only, which bear directly on the immediate business of the churches in their associated capacity; such as deciding on the fitness or unfitness of candidates for the holy ministry, preparing or revising translations of the Scripture, and conducting foreign missions. While each congregation could at any time avail itself of the wisdom of the associated churches in any of their perplexities, that wisdom might be so exercised as to be a light to direct, and not abused, and made a flame to scorch. Besides the incorporation of churches need in no instance be carried to a further extent than is plainly demanded by some practical necessity. If there were again an œcumenical council, it need not be either annual or perpetual, but only occasional, and for the transaction of special business. If any one object, that even then it would be liable to serious abuse, let it be remembered, that the *best* things are liable to the *worst* abuse; and if we are to enjoy nothing but those things which cannot be abused at all, we must seek

a place of exile somewhere out of this world, which God in His unerring wisdom and boundless goodness has created.

II.—*The Rev. J. A. James' Essay.*

Melancthon.—"The scheme that would be wide enough to comprehend all, and amalgamate all denominations into one, can in fact be satisfactory to none, and would involve a compromise which a due regard to truth should not allow us to make."[1]

Lord Herbert.—To amalgamate all, while their sentiments continue as they are, is simply impracticable. But I do not see how "*a due regard to truth*" can be said to have ought to do in *preventing* it. For you tell us that "different religious opinions" "cannot all be true, inasmuch as they are opposed to each other."[2] "A due regard to truth," we cannot but think, should keep Christians, especially Protestants, from embracing as true what is not true; and thus instead of being a hindrance to universal amalgamation, might be the very power to melt all denominations into one.

Melancthon.—"The term *denominational* is employed as simply indicating certain peculiarities of opinion, and in this sense implies nothing wrong."[3]

Bellarmine.—Allow me to answer you in words which your own pen has traced. "The New Testament is surely not so obscure a book, that, were its contents to fall into the hands of a hundred serious and impartial men, it would produce such opposite conclusions as must necessarily issue

[1] James' Essay, p. 153. [2] Ib. p. 208. [3] Ib. p. 154.

in the forming of two or more separate communions. A larger communication of the Spirit of truth would insensibly lead Christians into a similar train of thinking; and being under the guidance of that infallible Teacher, they would gradually tend to the same point, and settle in the same conclusions."[1] If these remarks be true, there *is* something *wrong* in denominational differences.

Melancthon.—"Let it, however, be inquired, when denominational distinctions are in one view considered as the result of human corruption, and in another the cause of its increase, whether it is not an evil which God has overruled for the greater good and purity of the Church upon the whole?"[2]

Lord Herbert.—I am afraid you are borrowing a leaf from some Jesuit's production. Have you forgotten Romans iii. 7 and 8?

Melancthon.—"How blessed a report would it be to go forth from hence, that in England, free England! great and mighty England! the different denominations of professing Christians had agreed together to retain their principles, but to abandon their prejudices, and had determined to subscribe the Apostle's declaration, that of the Christian graces, the most eminent is charity."[3]

Bellarmine.—If denominational *principles* be, as you have admitted, sometimes opposed to each other, of those in opposition to each other one-half must be erroneous. Is an *erroneous* principle not a *prejudice?* You might as well, therefore, think of travelling to the moon, as retaining your denominational principles, and abandoning your prejudices. Now, charity is truly the most eminent grace:

[1] Hall, quoted by James, p. 208. [2] Ib. p. 155. [3] Ib. p. 158.

but if your charity be based upon a confusion of the false and the true—of prejudices and principles, then it is a poisoned charity.

Theophilus.—In the essay that has just been referred to, there are two arguments used towards the close which do not well cohere together.

The first is sound and conclusive. It is said, "all hope of closer union that is not founded on a sincere and general determination to make the word of God the sole arbiter of our religious differences, is vain and delusive."[1] It is almost immediately added: "The multitude have never searched the Scriptures for themselves, and are therefore following in the track of their leaders; but when they shall turn from these to the lively oracles, and shall be found listening to their inspired and infallible responses, instead of prostrating their understandings before the creeds, catechisms, and articles of fallible men, they will be astonished to find how rapidly and how closely they can be made to approximate to each other. They will then discover that during the long night that has fallen upon them, and by the deceptive lights of human authority that have glimmered on their path, they have all more or less mistaken their way. The entire submission of our minds to the teaching of the truth and its divine author, will be like the rising of the sun upon our wanderings, to conduct us all back to the right road."

No more is asked by us than what is clearly expressed or fairly implied in this beautiful statement. It loses all its force and point and value, if we deny that there is something decidedly wrong in our denominational distinc-

[1] James' Essay, pp. 209, 210.

tions. And if there be something unscriptural in them, then we ought to aim, not only at their *ultimate*, but at their *immediate* overthrow. If there be nothing *essentially evil* in them, why should their abolition be even an "ultimate object of our desire and pursuit?" These distinctions must be not only palliated, but justified and defended as unexceptionable and perpetual fences in the garden of the Lord, or their extirpation should become the immediate and proximate care of the evangelical churches. When the battle of slave emancipation was being fought in this country, and when we were in the very crisis of the conflict, the watchword of the contending hosts was not *slavery* on the one hand, and *freedom* on the other. The battle was so far won, that *bare, naked*, slavery was abandoned, as beyond all argument—as bankrupt of every plea. The watchwords were, when the struggle was the fiercest, *immediate* or *gradual* abolition. So will it ever be. We must defend our denominational landmarks as scriptural and valid, or proceed forthwith to effect their removal.

If there be any force in these remarks, the other argument of the essayist will not be of much avail in reference to the point in hand. He says: "Next to this (the former argument) is a due estimate, never yet, perhaps, correctly made, after all that has been said upon the subject, of the incomparable superiority of those points of doctrine in which we are agreed over those on which we differ; and connected with this, a disposition to make the former, rather than the latter, the topics of our habitual and delighted reflection."[1] If, indeed, we could, forget the

[1] James' Essay, p. 211.

latter altogether, this plan might be successful. If the points on which we differ were really trivial, unconnected with the glory of our Redeemer, and the welfare of the Church, and the conversion of the world, it would be a graver offence and a more arrant folly than schism itself, to lose or disturb our refreshing spiritual meditations by submitting to the intrusion of such annoyances. But the fact is, we *cannot* forget the points on which we differ; they are practical and important; they nearly concern our duty; they touch the glory of our Master; they tell upon society. We cannot by any possibility evade their discussion or decision. Herein lies the very aggravation of schism, the harshness of its jarring notes, the bitterness of its rent fellowship, the misery of its results. We agree on certain momentous topics; through this agreement we hold elevated converse and seraphic communion with each other. By and by we differ, and differ on such a matter, that our fervid fellowship is interrupted, our visible union is broken, our harmony grows into dissonance, and we become a wonder to ourselves, as well as a scandal to others.

"There should be in us," it is urged, "such an ineffable delight in the fundamental truths of Christianity, such an exaltation of their glory and importance, as shall make us determined to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and him crucified. This will make us love with an unquenchable and truly fraternal affection all who partake with us in the same views."[1] When those who have experienced this "unquenchable and truly fraternal affection," come to oppose and contradict each other in inter-

[1] James' Essay, p. 212.

preting their Lord's will, and in seeking to make others participant in this "ineffable delight," there will arise a pang of grief, an agony of sorrow as deep and inconsolable as their love is unquenchable. And if such a result be equally unavoidable on both sides, then dire, indeed, is the calamity, and the cup of Christian sympathy and joy but a mixed and jumbled potion after all. If such a result be *not* unavoidable; if integrity and uprightness can preserve us from such a fell disaster; if it be true, that "as piety becomes more purified and strengthened, it will draw, and must of necessity draw, all classes of Christians nearer to each other, until an external and visible unity, as well as an internal one, shall be formed, and all its expected results shall be accomplished,"[1] then, surely, every Christian professor, who does aught to keep his brethren aloof from him, or who keeps aloof from them without just cause, incurs guilt of a crimson dye.

III.—*Dr King's Essay.*

Melancthon.—Is this not pushing the argument too far? "The disciples were found censurable in prohibiting one who walked not with them from casting out devils in the name of Christ, and were instructed by their Master to infer, from the very works which they interdicted, that the person performing them could not be against them, and must, by consequence, be on their side (Mark ix. 38, &c.) If, then, a visible separation from the Apostles, when they were presided over by the incarnate Saviour himself, con-

[1] James' Essay, p. 214.

sisted with a spiritual and essential unity; and if, even in these circumstances, a connection with the true Church was more to be determined by a Christian conduct than by a joint profession, it is easy to see that persons who walk not with us in our forms and regulations, but who are instrumental in casting out Satan from his sovereignty over men's minds, ought to be hailed by us as fellow-citizens in all that is essential to Zion's welfare; and instead of being frowned upon as adversaries or aliens, should be claimed, and encouraged, and honoured, as brethren. The application of these remarks is obvious. That Scottish Christians, all doing the work of Christ with more or less fidelity and power, are not to be held as really disunited, because in doing the same work they walk apart, but are to be classed on the same side, and as all belonging to the *one Church of Christ in Scotland.*"[1]

Bellarmine.—Your argument is built upon an illustration, and both fall to the ground, unless you maintain that, in the case referred to, "the visible separation" was substantially the same as that found among Protestant denominations. That it was so has not been proved, and is by no means likely; it was probably a merely temporary or accidental separation. When you affirm that "a visible separation consists with a spiritual and essential unity," you may mean that these two consist with each other *legitimately*, or possibly, and *guiltily*. If you mean the latter, your affirmation is contradicted by your illustration; and if you mean the former, you deny the oft-repeated maxim, that the terms of communion *ought to* be the same as the

[1] King's Essay, pp. 232, 233.

terms of salvation. And hence if "Scottish Christians are to be classed as all belonging to the *one church of Christ in Scotland,*" that one church is *not* such a church as is described in the New Testament, and was exemplified in the primitive age.

Lord Herbert.—Your very assertion that *Scottish Christians all belong to one church,* proves that their visible separations *are schisms,* and attended with all the guilt and disaster of schism.

Theophilus.—The aphorism, "He that is not against us is on our part"—(Mark ix. 40)—must be taken in connection with that other, "He that is not with me is against me"—(Matt. xii. 30). These two Scriptures cannot be understood and explained in mutual harmony, except by determining the very questions which have been engaging our attention—*the limits* of identity of opinion and of uniformity among Christians. If a man believe no Christian truth which has been set before him, and hold no communion with Christians around him, though he practise nothing openly *against* Christ, he must be held to be Christ's enemy. But, again, if an individual does give proof of attachment to Christ, however far short he may come of the attainments of others, he is to be regarded as a genuine disciple. And so long as he is *not against* any Christian truth or institution, he is to be reckoned a true and valuable member of the Church. In the circumstances of our Lord's disciples alluded to above, the first and sure indication of schism was the attempted prohibition on their part.

Melancthon.—It was formerly contended, that in order to Christian union there must be the absence of contradic-

tion on any important question. Now, I think, I can adduce a case in which union might be effected, notwithstanding such a contradiction. I refer to the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Bellarmine.—I should like to hear how you can make that out.

Melancthon.—"Perhaps it might be found in a friendly conference that the difference was not so formidable as has been sometimes alleged; that the Free Churchman has no wish to secularize religion by connecting it with the State, and the Voluntary Churchman just as little design, through a dissolution of this connection, to make Governments infidel." [1]

Lord Herbert.—If, indeed, the conflicting sentiments could be subjected, with the approbation of their supporters, to some such pruning or softening process as that just indicated, the contradiction would be in fact removed. It is quite another business to construct and consolidate an union, with a contradiction, such as the one in question, working in the minds of those who profess to be united.

Melancthon.—"On both hands it might be allowed, that Christ is head over the nations; and that, if there be any question, it does not respect the fact, but only the mode of his rule." [2]

Bellarmine.—There is no dispute between you and *us* about *the fact* of Christ's rule; the controversy refers only to its mode. Is his Holiness the Pope Christ's vicar, or is he not? On the principle now announced you might as readily agree with us, as agree among yourselves.

Melancthon.—"It might appear, that if neither the

[1] King's Essay, p. 257. [2] Ib. p. 257.

Establishment principle nor the Voluntary principle were made a term of office, a mutual forbearance respecting them would not obstruct the discharge of any present duty." [1]

Lord Herbert.—The subject at issue, taken broadly and substantially, seems to be this:—The duty of a Government towards its subjects in the matter of religion. Now Christians will find themselves, in regard to this question, in one or other of the following positions:—1. They may refuse to answer the question in any shape. But this is to confess, that the Bible and reason taken together are *not* a sufficient rule of faith and duty. 2. Their answers may be substantially harmonious and free from conflict, as we should expect them to be. In this case, the question cannot become an occasion of schism, whether it *be*, or be *not*, introduced into the terms of communion, or the terms of office. 3. Their answers may be conflicting and dissonant; in which case, even though the question be excluded from terms of office and terms of communion, it will undoubtedly become a source of heart-burning, distrust, and alienation, if not, in the course of time, the cause of an open rupture. 4. It may be maintained, as you have now done, that, in certain circumstances, and to certain parties, it is not at all a *practical* question, and may, therefore, be most wisely let alone. But you must perceive that this is cutting the knot, not untying it. You propose a temporary truce, if not a compromise. The moment, therefore, circumstances change, the schism will be developed. Is this the way of healing schism, that is sanctioned by the Bible, or approved by the understanding?

[1] King's Essay, p. 257.

Melancthon.—Notwithstanding the many and weighty matters in which we are harmonious, "are we to strike and split for ever on this question of the magistrate's power?—and even as an abstraction, as a constituent of naked theory, is it to prolong and multiply our actual dismemberments?" [1]

Bellarmine.—I cannot see how this question is, or can be, "an abstraction, a constituent of naked theory." If a magistrate were a member of your church, which you cannot but desire, might he not very reasonably expect you to be able to instruct him in this part of his duty?

Lord Herbert.—And, therefore, however numerous the matters of agreement may be, and however momentous, if there be a question of *human duty*, and of heaven's ordinance, on which Christians differ, not simply by less or more, but by conflicting judgments, as in the case before us, there is schism in all its deformity and evil.

Theophilus.—Admitting that the question between the two churches in Scotland referred to, in regard to Government *endowing religious teachers*, could be satisfactorily disposed of, the matter is far from settled. There is a schism in the evangelical community of Great Britain respecting the magistrate's power and duty, which is not distinctly marked by two denominations, but which is working extensive, and, we fear, incalculable evil. We refer to the business of national education. There are *apparently three* parties in the dispute; but we shall endeavour to shew that there are only two in reality. There are those who contend that Government should provide secular, without religious education. If there be any force

[1] King's Essay, p. 258.

in the statement, that man *must* have a religion of some sort from the nature of the constitution which God has given him, then the absence of the true religion implies the presence of a false religion. This conclusion is amply confirmed by facts, and by the statement of our Lord, "He that is not with me is against me." Hence it is impossible to separate secular and religious education. Every believer in the Bible will admit, that whatever obligations rest upon any individual to secure a secular education to the young, the same obligations, enhanced a thousand fold, rest upon him to secure their religious instruction. These views are confirmed by the actual proceedings of the Government of this country. They profess to aim at the promotion of secular education, and to act impartially towards all religious sects. But professed neutrality in religion is essential hostility to the true religion. *In fact* they patronise *all* religions; *in words* they patronise *none*. To treat all religions alike is equivalent to affirming that there is no true religion. It appears to us, then, that there are *only* two parties; the one affirming, and the other denying, the duty of Government to attend to the education of the young.

This division in the camp of evangelical Protestants puts them to a serious disadvantage in the presence of their Romanist and infidel opponents; the more especially when we consider that there are a great number of camp-followers, many of whom are all but infidels, and the remainder all but Romanists. It is this division which affords occasion and pretence for the Government to pursue its actual infidel policy;—a policy which is, indeed, distasteful to every party, not excepting our legislators themselves,

who tolerate it only on the transparent principle of a wretched expediency. This policy is tolerated by infidels as the semi-triumph of their views, and by Romanists as a stepping-stone to a higher vantage ground; while it is mourned over by every sound-hearted Christian.

If, now, the intelligent and devoted followers of Christ were united as one man, they might put an end to this miserable tergiversation; or, at all events, protest against it in such plain and emphatic terms as would brand it with reprobation. But those who are, in their general character, conscientious adherents of *Truth*, can unite on a special point only in the truth regarding that point. So long as the two parties in this case hold their conflicting sentiments, all compromise is impossible, either by the silence of one, or of both of them. It is a question of *duty;* something, therefore, must be done, or left undone. To refuse to decide a question of obligation, is quite as bad as to decide it erroneously. Hence the only method in which this contest can terminate is by both sides finding the truth. Opposition to the present Government scheme, when the opposing party is so grievously divided as to the scheme that should be substituted, seems to be captious, and is practically ineffectual.

This schism in the evangelical Church is painfully manifested in regard to Hindostan. All of us disapprove of the policy which lavishes in that vast empire large sums of money on schemes of education, from which Christianity is sedulously excluded. We go together to the government, and show them how inconsistent, how dangerous, how criminal are their proceedings. But when we, their reprovers and advisers, are asked, What should be done?

we immediately begin to reprove and criminate each other. The ultimatum of the British Protestant Church, taken collectively, on the question,—What should the Christian Government of India do to educate the youth of that heathen land? is thus expressed by the Evangelical Alliance, "the Government, *if it interfere at all*, ought neither to institute, continue, nor contribute to any school or system of public instruction whatever, from which the inspired word of God is excluded." On a great practical question to unite in telling our rulers, what they ought *not* to do, and confess our inability to shew them what should be done, and get confused and contradictory when requested to do so, is to expose our weakness and cover ourselves with shame.

It needs no prophetic wisdom to declare, that the welfare of the British empire at home and abroad is identified with the prosperity of her Protestant evangelical churches. Nor does it require the eye of a seer to discern that the internal prosperity and external power of these churches depend on their ceasing to be like a house divided against itself, and effecting an union on scriptural principles by coalescing in the truth on grave and momentous questions.

Let the men amongst us, then, who have consciences, while they revere the Bible and groan over our social miseries, begin to confer anew with their consciences and with their Bibles, in their closets and on their knees. Then if truth be no vanishing star, and conscience no marketable commodity, and the promise of the Spirit of truth and grace no forged warrant on the resources of heaven, and the intelligible union of Christian men no day-dream of enthusiasm, we may soon expect to see the elders of the

people, and the people too, coming to be "of one accord" on great social and religious questions. Though the genuine Christians in Great Britain were only a tithe in number of what they are, yet if, on a matter of such transcendent importance as the one lately referred to, they were *united* and *unanimous*, and their union and unanimity were based upon *the truth*, they would then undoubtedly hold the helm of affairs in their own hand, and might guide the now drifting and labouring vessel of the State safely and successfully, not only through her more immediate perils, but also through the breakers and beyond the rocks, that are looming before her so threateningly in her course.

As to the union of the Free and the United Presbyterian Churches in Scotland, it is undoubtedly the duty of each to originate a proposal to the other, with a view to a fuller measure of present co-operation, and the ultimate incorporation of the two bodies. Inasmuch as the difference of opinion that prevails in the two bodies, and is felt to be an obstacle to more perfect co-operation and actual union, refers chiefly, if not solely, to the duty of the civil magistrate in regard to religion, any proposal that may be made ought to embrace the following suggestions:—

I. That it is the duty of the Government to recall and cancel immediately and entirely all sums of public money that have been granted in any way to the agencies of the Church of Rome. The apathy of evangelical Protestants in regard to the Popish tendency and progress of the civil power is most criminal and most alarming.

II. That it is the duty of Government to abandon, as unprincipled and pernicious, the whole system of Privy Council grants in aid to schools of any and every religious character; and also, since education ought not be severed from religion, and since one great obstacle to a national system of education is the manifold divisions of the Protestant Evangelical Church, that it is the duty of the two bodies to seek, with an especial view to a system of National Education, not only to be united with each other, but also to extend

a scriptural union among all those whom they regard as their Christian brethren.

III. That it is the duty of Government to discontinue all connection with the idolatries of the people of India; and, for this purpose, to *alienate* all the revenues that are set apart to the support of idolatrous worship under Government sanction, whether this sanction be found in grants of public money either under heathen or Christian rulers, or be manifested in the fact that Government has acted as trustees or guardians of these revenues from time immemorial,—reserving always the life interest of present incumbents. The hallucination that prevails in the public mind on this topic is most deep and marvellous. There is no possible way in which Government connection with Indian idolatry can cease, but by the alienation of these revenues. No other method has been pointed out. The public zeal, then, that vociferously calls for severing the vessel of the State from the dangerous and doomed hulk of Hindoo idolatry, while at the same time it confesses its inability to point out the way in which this is to be done, and shrinks from the very mention of the only measure by which it can be effected, can scarcely be anything else but an object of derision to our better informed statesmen.

IV. That it is the duty of Government to enforce on the whole community in this country (and so far as practicable on professing Christians in India) cessation from all secular labour throughout the entire Sabbath-day; and especially to secure, in connection with the executive departments of the State, the Sabbath's unbroken rest,—as for example, by the discontinuance of Sunday mail trains. The battle about the sanctity of the Sabbath, like most of our religious battles, has been one of outworks. These Sunday mails have so long accustomed us to a damaged day of rest, and have so familiarised the community to the insertion of the wedge, that only the grossest outrages now startle, and these startle only a few. The Sabbath post has run so long unchallenged by the Christian Church in this land, and is now so generally connived at, if not approved, that our efforts in defence of the Lord's-day are paralysed, and our arguments and appeals fall to the ground frequently like pointless arrows or spent shot.

But supposing that these four suggestions were adopted and acted

upon, not only by the Christian community, but by the governors of the land (that they are not acted upon is our indelible disgrace), the work is less than half done. Government must know what to do, as well as what to leave undone. Hence—

V. It is the duty of the ministers, and elders, and members, of the two bodies, to endeavour, by means of an unprejudiced repernsal of the word of God, by mutual explanations and friendly conferences, and above all by seeking an effusion of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth, in answer to continued supplications, to come to be of one mind and of one accord in those things in which they are now unhappily otherwise minded.

VI. As to a basis of future negotiations and harmony, reference may be made to the following statements in the Testimony of the United Associate Synod of the Secession Church, adopted in 1827, namely,—"The Church and the State are entirely distinct, capable of existing without the slightest intrusive interference with the proper province of each, and ought not so to interfere." And again,—"The Church and the State owe mutual duties to each other, and, acting according to their sphere, may be signally subservient to each other's welfare." For it might be granted, on the one hand, that it is not the duty of the Civil Magistrate to provide temporal maintenance for the pastors of Christian congregations; and on the other hand, that it is not true, when stated without any qualification, that Government, *as such*, have nothing to do with religion.

VII. It only remains to add, that the two bodies should, in the meantime, resolve and practically endeavour, through Divine grace, that whereto they have already attained, they shall walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing.

The plan of procedure thus indicated seems to us to be one which, if acted upon, will extricate this empire from its present national perplexities, and save the churches from participating in the guilt and doom of idolatry, Popery, and infidelity. To take an example, there is, to an attentive observer, a double inconsistency in the recent demonstrations elicited, by the publication of Lord Stanley's despatch, enforcing the exclusion of the Bible from the Government schools in India.

In the first place, this is only one flagrant act among many, in which the authority of God's word is openly set at defiance, and the honour of God's name trampled in the dust by the Government of Great Britain. Now it is a principle as clear as it is sure, that if any individual will come forward as the champion of right in one instance, and wink hard at unrighteousness in another; if he will reprove the drunkard, and let the liar go from his presence unrebuked; if he will defend the Bible, and let the Sabbath be polluted; his zealous testimony in such cases really goes for very little, except to bring down reproach upon his own weak and vacillating endeavours. The witness-bearing of the Christian community against the profanity and godlessness of the Government, is so imperfect and so fickle; it is so arbitrary and so wayward; it swallows so many camels and strains at so many gnats; that in the loss of its consistency and earnestness, it loses much power, and frequently all respect.

In the second place, it is unmanly and unchristian to go to any one, and chide him harshly for doing wrong, while you profess yourself unable to tell him what is right. This is the very course which is frequently pursued by the Christian people of this land towards their rulers. It was boasted again and again, that the movement against Lord Stanley's despatch was not denominational, but catholic; that both Churchmen and Voluntaries could with propriety act in harmony together on such a question. Let us, then, suppose that the petition agreed to by both parties is taken to his Lordship. His Lordship might say, "You tell me what I must *not* do; please to tell me what I *must do*. You may assume a *negative* position in vouchsafing your advice; I cannot do so, but must take a *positive* position in action. The Government may, indeed, say nothing *officially* about any religious books at all. But, then, if we leave each teacher to take his own way in teaching religion, we virtually sanction what each does. For so long as the schools are supported and superintended by Government, we are really responsible for every book that is used, and for every lesson that is taught. In fact, therefore, so long as we have schools, we are under the most unavoidable necessity to sanction all religions, or only one, or none

at all. When we sanction all religions, we are assailed as latitudinarian and sceptical. If we were to sanction none, we should be accused of rankest infidelity. If we supported only one religion, we should be sneered at and distrusted, as intolerant. Pray, then, what are we to do?"

The plain and only answer to this question is, that Government must either abandon the work of education entirely, or, in carrying on that work, must sanction the one true religion, and it alone. And until a majority, at least, of earnest men in this country can agree what that one true religion is, and be united visibly as one man for its defence and its diffusion, there is no possible means of unravelling the present tangled skein of our national affairs. For, to pursue the argument in the special case already noticed, it may be urged upon the Voluntary or Dissenting Churchman, who has signed the petition to remove the ban from the Bible in India, "Suppose your petition were granted, and the interdict were removed, Government then, really and virtually, sanctions the teaching of the Bible,—that is, takes the money of the Hindoos to instruct them in Christianity, which, according to your principles, is the essence of persecution." In the same way, it may be objected to the State Churchman, "You support this petition, indeed; but it expresses only a fractional part of your demands. You think Government *ought* to do a great deal more in connection with this very business; you are, therefore, guilty of a culpable reserve." Hence it would appear that, in such circumstances, and on such a question, to approach Government with *only a negative* petition, is to avoid the real difficulty; it is to profess to be wise, and, in truth, to be weak and foolish; it is to attempt to instruct our rulers, when we need to be instructed ourselves.

In settling the question of education in India, Government *must* act on the Voluntary principle, or on its contrary. *Those who hold* either of these two conflicting principles *to be scriptural*, do wrong to approach Government on a question *whose solution necessarily involves these principles*, while they keep each his own principle in abeyance, in order to act for the moment with those who deny it. The Voluntary is inconsistent and culpable in petitioning Govern-

ment on a point which his peculiar principle goes to settle; for he sets aside that very principle at the very time he should bring it forward, that he may co-operate with those who totally reject it. The same remark holds true of the Churchman. Instead of bringing forward his darling ecclesiastical principle to secure a thorough religious education for Hindostan, he shelves it at the very instant he should table it, and that for the sinister purpose of securing a trivial victory in company with those who heartily oppose his pet dogma. The Government, therefore, have reason to say to both parties,—"You are combining together in a factious manner against our proceedings. You have no right on such a question to keep back your denominational or sectarian principles: for these principles are interwoven with the whole texture of the matter in hand. It is inconsistent with your Christian profession, and the avowed sacredness of these principles, to put them under a bushel, especially when that is done at the very crisis when they should be made obtrusive and prominent, and when the result of such a course on your part is not to help us in our arduous work, or remove obstructions; but when its obvious effect is only to complicate and retard the business of the State, and perplex her Majesty's Ministers. No, gentlemen, if you wish us to act consistently with Christian principles, be so good as to shew us the example."

Moreover, it is proper not only to notice the fact, that the petitioners against Lord Stanley's despatch, while professing themselves to be the reprovers of the Government, cannot conceal their incompetency to direct and advise as to a positive action, it will be also instructive to inquire more particularly into the explanation of this fact. The petitioners form two classes, as we have seen. It is only in their *conjoined* capacity, that they cannot give a definite and distinct direction for the future. Separately, each feels perfectly confident and competent to pronounce a judgment. But here is the secret, their respective judgments are in fair collision. Their common incompetency thus resolves itself into a deep and direct contradiction. Of the two parties each professes to know, clearly and surely, what should be done; but their respective dogmas are mutually destructive. And to make matters as bad as possible,

both parties dogmatically plead the authority of Sacred Scripture for their incompatible and opposing doctrines. They have fiercely contended with each other, and have been hurling against each other's assertions the texts of God's holy word. How can those who take such opposite views of the magistrate's duty, advise the magistrate what to do? If they were constituted magistrates themselves, they could not with these antagonistic principles govern the nation for a month. And what is now to be specially noticed, when these conflicting views of a most important and urgent duty are professedly based upon the Bible, the Bible is practically set at variance with itself. Is this not an indignity and insult offered to the sacred volume, and offered, too, in the very house of its friends? Is this not virtually dethroning the Bible from its supremacy? A great deal has been said, and well said, about the shameful inconsistency of the Government acknowledging itself to be Christian, and then treating the Bible with insolent disparagement. Have we not proved, that the self-constituted accusers of the Government, on this very point, are in the very utterance of their accusation, as palpably, if not as grossly, inconsistent as Lord Stanley himself?

IV.—*Dr Wardlaw's Essay.*

Melancthon.—"While we insist upon conscientiousness, we do plead for catholicity and union." [1]

Bellarmine.—Very good. But on what principle are the two compatible?

Melancthon.—"The principle on which fellow-christians, entertaining different sentiments on points which do not affect the foundation truths of Christianity, ought to cherish a *catholic spirit*, and maintain free communion with one another, is precisely that on which Paul enjoins the maintenance of communion between the two parties—the strong and the weak—in the Church at Rome. It is

[1] Wardlaw's Essay, p. 318.

simply this,—*the mutual concession amongst them of the claim of conscientiousness.* It is not that the weak should conform to the practices of the strong, or the strong to those of the weak;—it is not that any one of either party should surrender his judgment to another—that the strong should allow 'his liberty to be judged by another man's conscience'—or that the weak should surrender their conscientious scruples to what appeared to them the unwarranted liberties of the strong;—it is, that '*every man should be fully persuaded in his own mind.*'" [1]

Bellarmine.—I never thought the Protestant Bible to be so scandalously wrong. *Our* Bible represents the Apostle as *exhorting* all *to be* fully persuaded in their own minds; he never says anything to imply, that those who opposed each other in sentiment were both fully persuaded in their own minds.

Lord Herbert.—If Paul had inculcated the principle which is here alleged to be his, namely, that the abettor of error is equally conscientious as the adherent of truth, I should on that very ground have questioned his claim to divine inspiration.

Theophilus.—Stay, my friends, there may be some mistake here. You would never deny that an individual who, from his general character, is entitled to be called and regarded as a conscientious upright man, may yet be involved in several serious errors.

Melancthon.—That assertion is not what I mean; for it would be of no avail in the present argument. My opinion may be stated thus:—"There is one form in which, especially, justice to our fellow-believers demands the exercise

[1] Wardlaw's Essay, p. 327.

of a catholic spirit,—I mean *confidence in their integrity*,—in regard to those parts of the mind and will of our common master on which they differ from us. This is very commonly designated charity." [1]

Lord Herbert.—This is plain speaking. But if two Christians can take the same text of their Bible, and extract from it contradictory and conflicting meanings, and then exercise "confidence in each other's integrity" *in regard to that very matter*, Christian integrity is weak and worthless as a broken reed.

Bellarmine.—To identify *Christian charity* with such a spurious Protestant integrity is downright impiety.

Melancthon.—But if we look again to the Epistle to the Romans (ch. xiv.), we shall find, that "on the single ground of a mutual admission of each other's *conscientiousness* in their respective views and practices, they are both enjoined to maintain the cordiality of Christian communion:—'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.'" [2] For this reason:—"In every case it was necessary that there should be this 'full persuasion,' else the particular case would have come under the condemnation involved in the apostolic maxim—'Whatsoever is not of faith' (that is, whatsoever is not done from conviction, from a conscience satisfied of duty) 'is sin.'" [3]

Theophilus.—This reason assumes, that whenever we do a thing "of faith," we are always "fully persuaded in our mind;" and that the Apostle used the two expressions as indicating exactly the same thing. This assumption seems to us to be more than doubtful. There is, we think, a plain practical distinction between believing or

[1] Wardlaw's Essay, p. 290. [2] Ib. p. 324. [3] Ib. pp. 327, 328.

thinking an action to be right, and being fully and thoroughly and satisfactorily persuaded that it is right. Indeed, if there were not, there would be no room for the Apostle's exhortation, which is evidently intended to warn us against that easy belief, and slip-shod conviction, on matters of duty, that are so common, and to stir us up to a wakeful and searching sincerity.

Besides, your argument, as we understand it, goes on the supposition that it is true, not only that "whatsoever *is not* of faith *is* sin," but also that whatsoever *is* of faith *is not* sin. For you reason thus: if either of the two parties were acting, not of faith, or unconscientiously, that party would be doing what is sinful; and, of course, the two parties could not admit each other's conscientiousness and innocence. But if both parties are acting *of faith*, then they are both free from sin, and consequently can respect each other's conscientiousness.

Now, if you maintain that everything that *is* of faith *is not* sin, that is, that when a man believes what he is doing to be right, it is on that account to be held to be right, you shake the temple of morals to its very foundation. Nothing can be more palpably extravagant than to invert the Apostle's words, and contend that a man's opinions justify his unrighteous deeds. While the Apostle's statement is equally weighty and evident, that if a man act contrary to his own opinions, even though they be easily adopted and loosely held, and *erroneous* too, he is verily guilty.

But now if we distinguish between *a full persuasion* and a *bare belief*—between a conviction which is the result of intelligent, patient, and upright investigation, and a con-

ventional credence that has been accepted on insufficient, though plausible, grounds—between the plerophory of a sound and vigilant understanding, and the presumption of a slumbering and morbid temper of mind—we shall not only perceive the necessity that called for the exhortation, "Let every one be *fully persuaded* in his own mind," but we may also find a deeper meaning than before in the maxim—"whatsoever is not of faith is sin." They, at least, who would regard as the same the act that *is of faith*, and the act that *is of a full persuasion*, would be constrained to acknowledge this conclusion, that to act from opinions lightly adopted, and to be guided by sentiments hastily embraced, is sin,—such a mode of proceeding being opposed to the precept, "prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

Further, the exhortation to be "*fully persuaded*" is unworthy of a heathen sage, not to say an inspired Apostle, if it be conceded that a man may be fully persuaded, and yet be in error on the very point on which he has attained this full persuasion. But, perhaps, you can favour us with a definition of conscientiousness.

Melancthon.—It is "*a sincere and earnest desire to know the mind and the will of the Lord, and to hold as truth whatever he teaches, and practise as duty whatever he enjoins.* The term, indeed, defines itself. It consists in *feeling the conscience bound* by every intimation of that mind and will." [1]

Lord Herbert.—But your definition is loose at the very point where it should be accurate, so far as the present argument is concerned. Granting that a man in his

[1] Wardlaw's Essay, p. 296.

general character and conduct is conscientious in the sense now given to the term, does it follow that he is so in *every particular* act of his life? Take a special point, and can it be said that a man has "a sincere and earnest desire to know the mind and the will of the Lord" *on that point*, if he does not examine that point with all *diligence* and *honesty?* Or will you affirm that men may thus "prove" one of the "all things," and yet fail in "holding fast that which is good?" While an individual is *conscientiously* proving something with the view of holding fast that which is good, may the *good* elude his grasp, and his hand fill with ashes?

Bellarmine.—Allow me to answer these questions in the words of the Essayist. He first specifies a subject, namely, what relates to the constitution and ordinances of the Christian Church, and declares that, in regard to that subject, "there ought, among the true disciples of Jesus, to be *conscientiousness*,—that is, they should be as much in earnest in seeking to ascertain their Divine Master's will respecting this as respecting anything else."[1] A few pages afterwards he remarks:—"It is when any one embraces a sentiment different from our own, and, it may be, from a favourite one of our own, that the spirit of catholicity is put to the test. That is the truly catholic spirit, which, instead of immediately frowning such a one away, and banishing him beyond the pale of our intercourse, continues to give him the heart of love and the hand of fellowship, for the sake of 'the truth as it is in Jesus,' which he still retains, and for the sake of the very conscientiousness, which, as we reckon it a virtue in

[1] Wardlaw's Essay, p. 298.

ourselves, we cannot but approve of his holding sacred too." [1]

Here, then, we have a case where two individuals are supposed to examine a special topic *conscientiously*, that is, they have been "as much in earnest in seeking to ascertain their Divine Master's will respecting it *as respecting anything else.*" Notwithstanding this earnest search they come to irreconcileable and conflicting conclusions, and the true catholic spirit finds the fulcrum of its operation in the persuasion that these two parties shall each regard his own and his neighbour's conscientiousness as virtues, and hold them sacred!! The conscience or conscientiousness of *one* of them has most certainly proved itself a false guide; and if the other be no better, what can we know? Do heretics get hold of "the truth as it is in Jesus" without conscientiousness? Or how can they trust their conscientiousness *once*, if they cannot trust it *always?* Save me from the infidelity of Protestantism.

Melancthon.—Are there, then, no such things as "involuntary mistakes?" [2]

Lord Herbert.—Can there be a mistake without *thoughtlessness?* I never heard of a mistake that did not imply carelessness of some sort. Would you affirm that conscientiousness may land us in an "involuntary mistake," and thus deceive us? If so, you are more a sceptic than I am.

Melancthon.—"We must have no charity for errors that are subversive of the fundamental principles of the gospel." [3]

[1] Wardlaw's Essay, p. 306. [2] Ib. p. 294. [3] Ib. p. 316.

Bellarmine.—But for *minor* errors, the venial sins of Protestantism, you would have charity! Justice to the erring conscientiousness, we were told, is charity; and charity to the conscientious error is, I suppose, justice!

Melancthon.—Don't misunderstand me. "Would you think your child had correct conceptions of the way in which his love to you should be expressed, if he felt himself at liberty to pick and choose amongst your orders, doing such as he reckoned worth the doing, and leaving others undone,—saying to himself, These are but little matters, and therefore it is of no great moment whether they are done or not? If a parent, you would hardly, I ween, be satisfied with your child's taking the liberty of so reasoning and so acting; nor, if he did take it, would you think his heart quite in the right place." [1]

Lord Herbert.—The case of such a child is exactly your own case, when you talk of extending charity to some errors, and withholding it from others; or, in other words, when you cannot get far enough away from the abettor of one kind of error, while as to the abettor of another sort of error, you cannot take him close enough to your bosom.

Bellarmine.—And your inconsistency is truly striking, and even ludicrous, when we consider your own mode of reasoning, namely, that, "in a certain sense," attention to the smaller (command) is a stronger and a surer test of affection than the most zealous execution of the greater." [2] Therefore, "in a certain sense," you should have more forbearance to the errors of us, whom you regard as anti-

[1] Wardlaw's Essay, p. 302. [2] Ib. p. 303.

christ, or to those of profane unbelievers, than to those of your Protestant brother denominationalists.

Melancthon.—But you are speaking of one thing, and I am speaking of another; and I have reason to maintain, that, "if it be at all a correct principle, that the less in intrinsic magnitude, and the less in imperative obligation, the prescribed actions are, considered in themselves, the clearer and the stronger is the proof of love in the conscientious doing of them,—those Christians had need to set about the duty of self-examination, as to the indifference with which they treat all questions relative to the outward order of the Church of Christ."[1]

Theophilus.—Is this same principle, whose soundness we admit, and in your application of which we acquiesce, not equally potent against some of your former positions? Does it not follow, that the error of the atheist or the Romanist is not such a clear and strong proof of the *absence* of love, as the error of the denominationalist? Whether are those Christians who treat certain questions *as indifferent*, declining to answer them in any shape, or those Christians who answer them erroneously, and by adhering to their errors rend the Church, the more worthy of blame, and the more obviously convicted of defective or perverted love? Are you, then, prepared to take up the position, that you can trust your conscientiousness in examining the evidences of the Bible, but not in interpreting its pages? This would save you from the abyss of unbelief only to consign you to the bondage of Rome. Or will you resort to the subterfuge, that you can trust your conscientiousness in understanding one chapter

[1] Wardlaw's Essay, p. 304.

of the Bible, but not in understanding the next to it? This may preserve you from the fangs of spiritual tyranny, only, however, to leave you on the very verge of scepticism; or rather, perhaps, it fixes you on the boundary line between the domain of despotism and that of infidelity, where you will constantly be exposed, without any adequate protection, to the shafts of both parties, and be too ready to enlist them by turns on your side to defend yourself against the other. Such is the wretched policy Protestantism has too often been constrained to adopt, as we have seen in the special case before us.

There is only one way of avoiding this evil. There is only one plan by which we may escape the danger and the disgrace of hurrying to the Vatican to borrow Roman shields to quench the fiery darts of infidelity, and at another time, betaking ourselves to the waste howling desert of scepticism to fly from the fierce assaults of inquisitors and cardinals. It is this,—*acknowledging* and *acting* upon the principle, that the conscientiousness, which alone is worthy of the name, will never deceive us, either in examining the evidences of Christianity, or in interpreting any, even the smallest portion, of its inspired record. Such a conscientiousness does not exclude *ignorance*, but it would certainly exclude *error*. *Acknowledging* this principle would make us all thoroughly ashamed of our denominational schisms; *acting* upon this principle would speedily and surely heal them.

Melancthon.—"The case is simple. We say *we* are conscientious; and we insist upon having credit for it. Have we, then, any peculiar right to claim for ourselves that which we withhold from others? Have we a monopoly

of conscientiousness? Our fellow-Christians assure us *they* are conscientious; what better title have we to be believed by them than they have to be believed by us?"[1]

Lord Herbert.—Do you admit the Papist to be as conscientious as the Protestant?

Bellarmine.—Do you allow the infidel to be as conscientious as the Christian?

Theophilus.—They who are conscientious have a monopoly of truth; and they who embrace the truth intelligently have a monopoly of conscientiousness. To allow two men—we care not who they are—to have equal conscientiousness in the same matter, while yet one of them is in error as appears by their mutual opposition, just because they both claim conscientiousness, is that sort of charity which "thinketh no evil," even when the evil is reeking and fuming before it.

Melancthon.—"Suppose it admitted, that there can be no such thing as *perfectly innocent error*, Is it safe,—nay, is it consistent with the self-diffidence and humility of the Christian character,—to assume our own infallibility,—not our own exclusive conscientiousness merely,—but the absolute impossibility of the error lying with us; as if we, of all Christians on earth, were altogether beyond the reach of any perverting or biassing influence."[2]

Bellarmine.—"The self-diffidence and humility" that *always* shrinks from the assumption of conscientiousness, and consequently from the assertion of truth, is the sure characteristic, not of the Christian, but of the sceptic.

Theophilus.—It is one thing to maintain that in a given dispute or controversy, the one or other of the parties must

[1] Wardlaw's Essay, p. 331. [2] Ib. p. 332.

be wrong and blameable, because they contradict each other; and quite another thing to decide who is the guilty party. Now here is the scandalous disgrace and ruinous folly of our Protestant schisms, that we hastily, and rashly, and boastingly, come into collision with each other in interpreting the Scriptures; and we come into collision *in this temper*, just because we think collision may take place *without blame on either side.* Whereas if this truth were diffused among us, and felt in its searching power, that such collisions as issue in the organization and maintenance of different denominations, cannot occur without a want of conscientiousness on the one side or the other, we should come to regard the Bible with far higher and holier reverence, and our brother-christians with a more tender and warm affection. A collision of sentiment, and a schism in the Church, instead of being considered as a matter of course, or an inevitable event, or a thing to glory in, would excite the most poignant Christian grief, and every true-hearted disciple would labour and deny himself to the last, in order to prevent the advent of this ecclesiastical plague, and the occurrence of this moral earthquake, as well as to repair their ravages when nothing could arrest their work of desolation.

Melancthon.—Well, argue as you may, it is abundantly obvious, that "while there are conscientious Presbyterians, there must be a *Presbyterian denomination;* and while there are conscientious Independents, there must be an *Independent denomination;* it being impossible that the same church can be governed upon both the Presbyterian and the Congregational model."[1]

[1] Wardlaw's Essay, p. 316

Theophilus.—When these two systems of church government are dispassionately examined, and extreme views on either side are excluded, it is by no means easy to find a plain and important principle, which is denied by the one party and affirmed by the other. We do not then admit that Presbyterianism and Congregationalism are in themselves utterly or practically irreconcileable. If they are, only *one* of them can possibly be scriptural.

Bellarmine.—Let us, for the sake of argument, suppose that they are, as affirmed by our friend here, totally incompatible; I should like to hear his definition of a *conscientious Independent.*

Melancthon.—There is a statement in the preface to the treatise on "Congregational Independency,"[1] which may answer your question. "Had the case been one that depended, at every turn, on minute etymological and exegetical distinctions, I should have felt my ground too narrow and tremulous to warrant confidence. All that I have aimed at, and all, therefore, that my readers have to look for, is a plain, straightforward, Bible argument; requiring no more, in order to a clear apprehension of it, than an ordinary amount of discriminative sagacity, and of its patiently thoughtful application."

Lord Herbert.—Your meaning is, if I have not entirely misapprehended your language, that if a Christian will read his New Testament, or your treatise on church government, with "an ordinary amount of discriminative sagacity, and of its patiently thoughtful application," or simply, with common honesty and diligence, he will be neither an Episcopalian, nor a Presbyterian, but a Con-

[1] By Dr Wardlaw, Glasgow, 1848, pp. vii. viii.

gregational Independent. I am altogether at a loss to perceive how, after such an explicit statement, you can with any pretence to consistency, speak of a sincere or conscientious Presbyterian or Episcopalian; for they are men who hold to certain opinions, which they maintain the Bible sanctions; and now you have affirmed of these men, that they have adopted these opinions and contended for them to the rending of the Church, while all the time they have not consulted the Scriptures on these points with ordinary integrity!

Bellarmine.—Besides, you have never brought, you cannot bring, a heavier charge against Socinian heretics, or against ourselves, than what you have now brought against Episcopalians and Presbyterians, namely, putting a meaning on the words of the Bible which they will not bear, or bandaging the eyes not to see their true import. And if they err on a *minor* point, and we on a *graver* one, that does not exculpate them; it rather, if you adhere to one of your former arguments, enhances their guilt. To treat *them*, therefore, as your fellow-christians, and *us*, as reprobates, is capricious and offensive in the extreme.

Melancthon.—Waiving theoretical difficulties, I am free to acknowledge, that "if a Presbyterian and a Congregationalist, or a Baptist and a Pædobaptist, object to sitting down with each other at the table of the Lord, one of two inferences must follow,—either they must, on account of their difference of sentiment as to the government or rites of the Church, question each other's Christianity; or it must be, not as believers—disciples—Christians, but as Presbyterians or Congregationalists, Baptists or Pædobaptists, that they, respectively, consider themselves as en-

titled to a seat at the feast! And is there any one bearing the name of Jesus now to be found, who holds and will defend so anti-scriptural and narrow-minded a position? Let it be remembered, reader, it is not *our* table,—it is *the Lord's* table; and shall we, then, consider ourselves as entitled to shut the door of admission to it against any whom, there is every reason to believe, the Divine Master of the feast would himself receive? Is there no presumption in this? It is not *a Presbyterian* table, or *an Independent* table—it is a *Christian* table." [1]

Bellarmine.—This is precisely my argument against denominationalism. Whilst different denominations do exist, intercommunion among their respective members can only be occasional and rare. As soon as Protestants cease to make it the rule of *their ordinary procedure* to take their places at the eucharist, not *as* Presbyterians, or *as* Episcopalians, or *as* Independents, &c., but *as Christians*, from that moment denominationalism becomes extinct. If there be few or none who will "*defend* so anti-scriptural and narrow-minded a position," certain it is, that the Protestant Church, as a body, has made it, practically, her dwelling-place. If some do, on a special occasion, get up an *inter*-communion, and then once in a lifetime, perhaps, or in a decade, sit down at the Lord's table, *as Christians*, this fact only manifests more clearly, and rebukes more sharply, the habitual and universal sin of the Protestant community in this matter. It is plain, therefore, as language can make it, that so long as your separate denominations confront each other, it is worse than empty talk for Protestantism to pretend to have *the Lord's* table.

[1] Wardlaw's Essay, pp. 338, 339.

Each petty ecclesiastical caste, each sectarian clan, has, and has no more *its own* table. An impartial onlooker can see *Presbyterian* tables, and *Independent* tables, and so forth, in rank abundance, and in envious rivalry, if not, as aforetime, in fierce defiance, of each other. Where, then, can you find *a Christian* table, but within the pale of the holy Catholic Church?

Lord Herbert—That is not the present question, else I should give you an answer. As to the point in hand, your statement indicates the actual and morbid condition of Protestantism, judged by its own profession. To be told by Protestants, in the same connection, that there *must* be this and the other denomination, because there is this and the other *conscientious* contradiction of sentiment, savours of that sort of infidelity which turns conscience into a laughing-stock.

DIALOGUE V.

THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE.

I.—*No Compromise.*

Melancthon.—The Evangelical Alliance is, doubtless, one of the greatest and happiest manifestations of Christian union that the world has ever seen.

Bellarmine.—This will best appear by examining and weighing some of its principles and proceedings.

Melancthon.—One of the principles of the Alliance may be expressed in two words, "no compromise."

Lord Herbert.—That is, if I understand it aright, all parties are resolved to adhere to their own peculiar opinions, however notorious it may be to the unbelieving world, as we are styled, that one-half of these opinions at least, being contradicted by the other half, are false and anti-christian.

Melancthon.—The principle may be better explained thus, in the words of one of the speakers[1] at the Liverpool Conference in 1845:—"Since it must be a union in faith, it must be a union without compromise. I perfectly,

[1] Hon. and Rev. B. W. Noel.

and most heartily, concur in every word that has been spoken upon that point to-day,—that no foundation of union can be laid in the smallest compromise. Nay, I go beyond Dr Cox. I am not prepared to sacrifice anything important and essential; but more than this, I fully agree with my friend, Dr Wardlaw, that we cannot sacrifice an *iota* of what we believe to be truth. I agree with Dr Brown, in saying, that I am not even prepared to *conceal* an iota of truth; nor can I call on any of my brethren to do what I would not do myself, abandon what he believes it to be a duty which he owes to his God and Saviour to maintain."[1]

Lord Herbert.—It does strike me that the Alliance thus described is rather a curious one. There are "*important and essential*" contrarieties of sentiment held by its members; for if there were not, this flourish about "*not sacrificing*" them were surely out of place. Moreover, these "important and essential" contradictions are felt to be nearly and powerfully related to the object of the Alliance, namely, Christian union, inasmuch as they possess an inherent and mighty tendency to dissension and division. Else why speak of them at all at meetings of the Alliance? Now, if not *one iota* of these is to be sacrificed, no, nor even "*concealed,*" what can such an association be, but the very temple of discord, or a scene of real, though silent, compromise. If you will not "abandon what *you* believe to be a *duty,*" how can the man who calls it a *sin,* and re-

[1] Conference on Christian Union. Narrative of the Proceedings of the Meetings held in Liverpool, October 1845. London. P. 23. This document is referred to afterwards, for brevity's sake, thus: "Liverpool Conference."

gards it as a serious obstacle to Christian union, fraternise with you in efforts to promote that union, except on principles which are hopelessly unintelligible, or which resemble those recognised and adopted by unscrupulous partizans, who make religion and morality bend to the accomplishment of their designs.

Bellarmine.—All the men concerned in the formation of this Alliance were not so destitute of discernment and sensibility as to be indifferent to this consideration. One said, "he regarded '*no compromise*,' as one of the Alliance conditions, as our deepest humiliation; because it necessarily implies, that through the imperfection of our knowledge, and the weakness of faith in us, though studying the Word of God, we have not come to the same mind, and the same conclusions. And if we are at all acquainted with the human heart, we must justly charge it on our natural blindness, and our natural corruption. In this respect, I believe our avowal of 'no compromise' is our weakness, our infirmity, our humiliation before God."[1]

Melancthon.—"If called on, for the sake of Christian union, to do anything, however small, which my Divine Master interdicts me from doing, or to decline doing anything which my Divine Master commands me to do, I must decline doing the one, or refraining from the other; because I should then be adopting one of the principles of that very system of superstition we seek to oppose, 'of doing evil that good may come,' saying, 'my sin is for the benefit of the Church.'"[2]

[1] Rev. E. Bickersteth. The Evangelical Alliance; its Origin and Development. By Dr Massie. London, 1847. Pp. 237, 238.

[2] Rev. R. Wardlaw, Liverpool Conference, p. 10.

Lord Herbert.—Exactly so. And when one member of this Alliance declares that his Divine Master *forbids* him to do the very same thing, which another member asserts that Divine Master *commands*, if there be *no compromise of either of these conflicting views*, it does seem plain even to a sceptic that there is here a *compromise of truth*. Both of these men know that one of them must be wrong, and the foundation, "no compromise," just means that he that is wrong shall adhere to his error.

Bellarmine.—With what consistency, then, could it be said by a member of the Alliance, "I deeply feel that truth alone can unite us; and that, in proportion as we get more truth, we get full and entire union."[1] If "no compromise," as just explained, be one of the principles of union, that union is evidently based on a mixture of truth and error. How can it be said then, that "truth *alone*" unites you. How severe are the following remarks of the same speaker. "Whether we will admit it or not, it is not necessity, but sin, that keeps us asunder; and to cherish error on the one hand, and to stretch out the other for union, is a solecism and contradiction."[2]

Theophilus.—When the same honoured individual immediately asks—"Here, then, is our great difficulty—who shall decide what is truth in things in which we differ,"—had he and all his learned and pious associates forgotten the Divine exhortation—"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good;" and the Divine Promise—"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth?" If the Evangelical Alliance were, not merely in profession, but in reality, based upon the passage

[1] Rev. E. Bickersteth, Liverpool Conf., p. 11. [2] Ib. p. 11.

(Phil. iii. 15, 16) so frequently referred to, instead of proclaiming no compromise of contradictory sentiments, its aim would have been to seek diligently and hopefully, for their *reconciliation*. Till this watch-word of "no compromise" be silenced, the reduction and reconciliation of differences cannot even be attempted. Let Mr Thelwall's suggestion be broadly denied, or fully carried into practice, namely, "that if all entirely submitted to the Bible, some would know less, and some would know more, but there would be no direct collision. They should desire more and more to subject their whole souls to the teaching of God's Word, and to avoid bringing their own notions into the Bible, or explaining away anything contrary to their present circumscribed notions."[1]

Melancthon.—It is true that "we should not seek union at the cost of requiring a man to forego anything which he believes to be a part of the will of Christ, or to do anything which he believes to be contrary to that will. I fully concur in that sentiment, but fear we may somewhat misapprehend each other in respect to it. Were we to wait till we met with a system, in all respects, to our judgment, I presume few of us would connect themselves with any system existing. In order to our union, we only need look on the systems of each other with the same charity, wherewith we look each upon his own. I look on this meeting with great interest, as the beginning of that better tone of thinking and feeling, with which Christ is about to bless the Church—of a sanctified manhood—of the sort of mind, which fits a man for looking at all sides of a truth—taking a comprehensive view

[1] Liverpool Conference, p. 12.

of it—giving all the parts their proper place and apportionment. I think there has been a miserable one-sidedness among us, in respect to questions of this nature. A one-sided man is only half a man; it is your whole man who looks at truth all round. I would that we were smitten with a passion for concord, as deep and habitual as our passion for liberty. I see much beauty in a band of men, capable of subordinating lesser things for agreement in greater things. . . . Oh, sir, it is no time for us to allow trifles to keep us asunder, to prevent us from acting in concord in relation to the great interests we love."[1]

Lord Herbert.—The mind of this speaker evidently felt uncomfortable under the "no compromise principle." He could not, of course, openly controvert it, but he adroitly sets it aside. While modestly guarding against a mere misapprehension of its meaning, he surely glides into a contrary principle. He certainly insinuates that what a man *believes* to be the will of Christ, may *not* be the will of Christ; or that the man may attach far more consequence to the matter in question than Christ does; which is just another form of stating the opposition between Christ's will and the man's belief. He asks his associates to look at "*all sides* of a truth, giving all the parts their proper place and apportionment," which, as we have just seen, the "no compromise" principle obviously prevents by making error as good as truth. Having thus *virtually* set aside this principle, he must substitute another in its place; and he does so. "I see much beauty," he remarks, "in a band of men, capable of subordinating *lesser* things for agreement in *greater* things;" "Oh, sir, it is no time

[1] Dr Vaughan, Liverpool Conference, pp. 13, 14.

for *trifles* to keep us asunder." It is clear as a sunbeam that men do not quarrel about anything, at the very time *both of them* acknowledge it to be a *trifle*. If *trifles only* have kept Protestants asunder, the talk about "no compromise" is ridiculous. Hence it is obvious that what others regarded as "important and essential," this speaker is disposed to characterise as "trifles," and "lesser things." If it be *the same* differences among Protestants to which he would apply his principle of "*subordination*," and they would apply their principle of no compromise, then the two principles are diverse and irreconcilable. If the two principles be not applied to the same differences, the one cannot be said even to prevent a misapprehension of the other. Here then is a schism or rent in the very foundation of this Alliance.

Bellarmine.—This view of the case is confirmed by the remarks of another speaker,[1] who is reported to have said, "If we had the magnanimity, which, recollecting that 'the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy,' would receive 'him who is weak in the faith, but not to doubtful disputations' —'and the charity which suffereth long and is kind'— we should all be in the fair way to an effective measure of Christian union. Magnanimity; because, Sir, conscientiousness (which is an essential of Christianity) is only a complete blessing, when it goes along with comprehensiveness of vision."[2] These last words seem to me to be a soft way of saying, that misdirected conscientiousness, which calls for a "no compromise" pledge, is a great evil. To have spoken thus plainly might, perhaps, have dis-

[1] Dr James Hamilton. [2] Liverpool Conference, p. 15.

turbed the harmony of the proceedings. But this would have been better than to have wellnigh mangled both truth and Divine authority at one stroke, as there is a tendency to do in the same address. For in the next page we read thus: "There are here *jus divinum* Congregationalists, Episcopalians and Presbyterians; but I hold that we are all *jus divinum* unionists. I believe there is as much authority, and as much urgency, in the command to contend earnestly for Christian love, as to contend for our denominational peculiarities." The Congregationalist who claims Divine authority for his peculiarity should look upon the Episcopalian who makes the same claim for his specialty, and so on through all the *jus divinum* sects, as a very antichrist; for he clothes a fancy of his own in the august authority of heaven. This proceeding, to use common but expressive phraseology, is "rank popery." It is truly something like the acme of extravagance, to behold a large number of these *jus divinum* denominationalists meeting together, and, instead of denouncing each other for committing one of the greatest crimes, "in teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," which they must verily believe that each other has been guilty of, if they have any belief in truth at all, shaking hands heartily and saying many prayers, and styling themselves "*jus divinum* unionists." Has it not been shewn, that "to contend for denominational peculiarities is to pour cold, icy water upon Christian love?" If then there be as much divine authority to contend for the one as for the other, that authority is divided against itself. The same speaker concluded thus: "Let us agree, not to *give up* anything, but to go forth and *do* something." If the

members of the Evangelical Alliance give up nothing, and *base their union upon the resolution to give up nothing*, no, not even the errors which are proved to exist among them by their palpable contradictions, their association will be like the feet of Nebuchadnezzar's image, which were "part of iron and part of clay." From any such amalgamation of heterogeneous materials our holy Catholic Church has little to fear.

Melancthon.—"What we have to do is surely this,—to abandon the consideration of our peculiar systems, whether true or false, as the ground of our association in this brotherhood of Christian love and pious action."[1]

Lord Herbert.—I do not wonder that you should abandon these peculiar systems as *the ground* of your union; I rather wonder you should have felt it necessary to make such a disavowal. What surprises me is, that you constitute the abandonment of the consideration of your peculiar systems an indispensable condition of your association. Is it not a fact, which has been acknowledged over and over again, that these "*peculiar systems*" have been a chief cause in delaying the realization of "this brotherhood," such as it is, and are also in powerful action at the present time, cramping and distorting its development and progress? Hence to contrive a scheme of Christian union, which is avowedly based on a forgetfulness and disregard of these peculiar systems, seems to resemble the conduct of a pilot who, when called to steer his vessel through a narrow rocky channel, should begin by throwing his chart into the fire.

Melancthon.—"We must come together as brethren,

[1] Dr Cox, Liverpool Conference, p. 20.

leaving our parties, not abandoning our systems; retaining our systems in the convictions of conscience, and the firmness and consistency of religious action; but, at the same time, shaking hands and shaking hearts together, as men and as Christians,—determined to carry out the essential principles of New Testament Christianity in our own conduct, and to carry them forth, as far as practicable, everywhere, even to the ends of the earth." [1]

Bellarmine.—I confess I am puzzled to understand *how* you can "leave your party," and, at the same time, "retain your system in the convictions of conscience, and *the firmness and consistency of religious action.*" It is surely impossible to do both. It may be an "essential principle" of *Protestant* New Testament Christianity, to grant plenary indulgences to self-styled conscientious errors, and allow conflicting parties to be both equally right, and equally upright, in each claiming a *jus divinum;* but as such a notion is opposed to common sense, not to speak of Christianity, to carry it to the ends of the earth, is only to make it more ridiculous.

Melancthon.—I should urge divided Christians to cultivate union by such appeals as this:—"You *differ* about forms of church government. Very well; stand as far apart one from the other as you will, and in proportion to the real importance of these forms—step! march! You agree in respect of your sin and misery; your hope of salvation; your great object in this world; and your everlasting home. Now come as close together as your agreement therein demands. Why, sirs, these points on which you agree are infinitely more grand and sublime than

[1] Dr Cox, Liverpool Conference, p. 20.

those in which you differ. And if you *unite*, in proportion to your agreement, it would be so closely, that your difference and distance would be reduced almost to an imperceptible point." [1]

Lord Herbert.—It is unnecessary to dwell on the inconsistency of representing any of your denominational differences as waning to an almost imperceptible point; it has been so frequently exposed. But do you not perceive that your statement overlooks entirely the real difficulty of the question? It is your very differences on lesser matters that stand in the way, and necessarily prevent you from coming together so closely as your asserted agreement on important matters demands. A neck of land can separate two seas. As the land must be cut before the seas can meet and mingle, so your contradictions must be removed and cancelled to allow all the love you talk of to form one ocean, or flow in one channel. But when will that be?

Theophilus.—Sooner than some of us, perhaps, expect. If it be once perceived and acknowledged generally, that the resolution of our denominational contradictions is the only road to the accomplishment of Christian union, and that the resolution of them is a practical attainment, on the ground that reason *conscientiously* employed never misleads, and that the promised Spirit is "the Spirit of Truth," then, with the divine blessing, mountains of obstruction might speedily disappear. The union which is desired by every intelligent disciple is "a thorough union; an exceedingly complete one; one actuating us constantly; a permanent union;" "not a holiday union, not a platform union; but such a union as our Lord contemplated,

[1] Mr Hinton, Dr Massie's vol. pp. 227, 228.

when he said, 'That they all may be *one*,'—such a union as shall dazzle the world, and disconcert those who predict that we cannot unite." [1] How can such a union be brought about, except it be not only founded upon agreement in some great leading truths, but also exclude conflicting judgments on important points of faith and duty? Accordingly when Christians seek to be united on perspicuous and permanent principles, instead of beginning by a mutual pledge of "no compromise" on those points on which they are at variance, they will make these very points the object of their first attention, and take their stand together on a penitent and hopeful resolution to seek by prayer and patient diligence for the reduction and removal of their conflicting sentiments.

Melancthon.—The adoption of these views would alter entirely the aspect and position of the Evangelical Alliance.

Theophilus.—It is not impossible that that noble institution may be sailing on the wrong tack.

Melancthon.—"An increasing class have felt that Christian concord can never be effected by civil compulsion on the one hand, nor by a scheme of giving and taking on the other. They feel that Christian union is an affair of neither legislation nor logic; but, as in the beginning, must be the result of love. Intelligent enough to distinguish the outward differences of his brethren, but perspicacious enough, through all peculiarities, to discover their vital identity,—magnanimous enough to overlook much that he may reckon odd or erroneous, for the sake of more that he deems noble and right,—full of that regenerate

[1] The Hon. and Rev. B. W. Noel.

instinct which hails the Saviour's image rather than his own fac-simile, and shining in those holy beauties which win each Christian heart,—so amiable as to make his fellowship an object of desire, so cordial and catholic that he rejoices to give it, but withal, so loyal to the truth, and so explicit in his conduct, that he can give it, without suspicion of his personal soundness,—his is the right attitude for Christian union, whose personal piety is constantly attracting brotherly love, and whose prompt affection instantly reciprocates each overture of brotherly kindness. In healing the dissensions of a divided Church, legislation will fail, and logic will fail, but LOVE will never fail." [1]

Lord Herbert.—Is it not plain that, when these "dissensions" are based on conflicting opinions, love cannot by any possibility heal them, except by "compromise?" Hence this beautiful paragraph virtually denies, and most surely sets aside, all that has been advanced about "*no* compromise." I should like, moreover, to understand how an honest man, who is "loyal to the truth," can be "magnanimous" in "overlooking much that he may reckon *erroneous*."

Bellarmine.—The whole statement is satisfactorily answered in these words of another document:—"No professing Christian can avowedly ridicule Christian union; but there are not a few who disparage all attempts made to advance it. They hint that sameness of opinion cannot be forced,—that combination, in being pushed, may peril independence; and that, if each cherish in his own bosom true allegiance to Christ and benevolence to his neighbour,

[1] An Address on behalf of the London Branch of the Provisional Committee, p. 4

he carries out a good principle to its utmost attainable extension. All beyond this is doubted of, or scoffed at as extravagant and Utopian.

"But the Word of God speaks a different language. It teaches us that, if we sincerely seek, we shall certainly reach a perceptible agreement, and enjoins the acquisition of it as an imperative duty. 'Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.'—(Rom. xii. 10.) 'Be of the same mind one toward another.'—(V. 16.) 'Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.'—(Rom. xv. 5-7.) 'Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.'—(1 Cor. i. 10.) Citations like these might be indefinitely multiplied, and it will not be found easy to peruse them with candour, and suppose them to be generally exemplified in the mutual bearing of Christians. There is verily a fault among us, that exhortations so explicit, solemn, and numerous, are so lightly evaded." [1]

Theophilus.—Let those who flaunt the banner of "no compromise," and those who oppose and supersede it by the banner of an imbecile love,—let both parties hear again, and inwardly digest, what they have both often

[1] Statement of the Scottish Delegates. Appendix to Liverpool Conference, p. 73.

disregarded. "*The Word of God teaches us that, if we sincerely seek, we shall certainly reach a perceptible agreement, and enjoins the acquisition of it as an imperative duty.*"

Melancthon.—"I am looking around upon this splendid building (the Free Trade Hall, Manchester), and see it illuminated by various lamps, of different sizes, and different forms, and in different positions; some less, and some greater; some more, and some less ornamented. But there is gas in each; and it is the gas that illuminates the building; and perhaps we should find it difficult to say which of them sends the most light into the room; they are all contributing it together; and we are rejoicing in the splendour of the effect from a common gasometer. And, sir, what is our Alliance? What are our different churches but so many lamps? There is gas in each; they are of different sizes, and they are of different forms, and in different positions; some give greater, and some less light to our dark world; but they have all the fundamental truth of the gospel; and the true member of each values his church, not for the sake of its polity, but because that polity, in his view, is most adapted to hold up the truth to the world."[1]

Lord Herbert.—But the large lamp does not say to the small one, nor the small lamp to the large one, you are wrong; as the Independent says to the Episcopalian, and the Episcopalian to the Independent. The ornate lamp on the east side does not say to the plain lamp on the west side, you are acting contrary to a divine command, as the Christian of one polity says to his brother of another polity. If each one values his church, because its "polity, in his

[1] The Rev. J. A. James, Dr Massie's vol. p. 232.

view, is most adapted to hold up the truth to the world," his view must rest upon grounds of mere expediency, or upon an alleged divine institution. If the superiority of any polity rest in the view of its supporters only upon grounds of expediency, the adherents of such a polity, who, to preserve it, erect or support a distinct denomination, are transgressing the great command regarding love and unity out of deference to their own private opinions. If a divine institution be alleged for incompatible polities, then is one party culpable; and you are brought back again to the slough out of which you have in vain attempted to extricate yourself.

Bellarmine.—Hence it was a vain boast when you said. "We are not here to burn our creeds, and dance with maddened enthusiasm around the bonfire; but we are here to hold fast what we believe to be truth; but, at the same time, to hold it fast in love."[1] Since what some of you believe to be truth, others of you believe to be error, you would all, most certainly, have acted a more reasonable part, if you had met together to burn the erroneous portions of your respective creeds.

Melancthon.—It was unanimously agreed as the deliberate conviction of the London Conference—"That, in this Alliance, it is distinctly declared that no compromise of the views of any member, or sanction of those of others, on the points wherein they differ, is either required or expected; but that all are held as free as before to maintain and advocate their religious convictions with due forbearance and brotherly love."[2]

[1] The Rev. J. A. James, Dr Massie's vol. p. 231.

[2] Abstract of the Proceedings and Final Resolutions of the Con-

Lord Herbert.—Is it not a fact that the gentleman[1] who moved the adoption of that resoultion spoke in the following terms?—with what consistency I leave you to judge:—"There is a mode of speaking on this subject which, I confess, I do not like. There is a talking of *forgetting* our differences, and *banishing* our differences; and, as some express it, *merging* our differences. I go further than all these: I want the differences to be done away with altogether. I am afraid that, if we merely agree to *forget* them, it will not be long before something forcibly reminds us of them. I am afraid, if we merely *banish* them, like some old culprits, they will find their way back before the time of punishment has expired. I am afraid, if we only *merge* them, there will be some sectarian antiquary who will invent a diving-bell to bring them up from the bottom of the ocean. I think the best way, therefore, is *to get rid of them altogether;* and I have very great confidence in the moral influence of this Alliance, in finally disposing of our differences altogether. It is not the inability to place our distinct opinions in a clear light, that keeps us from seeing eye to eye; but there is a worldly feeling—a prejudice—in our breasts, that prevents us from doing justice to our own intellects and judgments; and until such an influence as that I have adverted to is exercised, we shall never be able to see these things alike. There is a beautiful passage in one of the Prophecies, that I have been delighted to dwell upon, in connection with this movement—'Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice;

ference held in Freemasons' Hall, London, on August 19, 1846, and following days, pp. 7, 8.

[1] Dr W. Symington.

with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.' Here is the order of things—'They shall lift up the voice,' as we have been doing; 'With the voice together they shall sing,' as we have been doing for days together. And *then* the mists and darkness will clear away, and we shall 'see eye to eye;' and *then* 'the Lord shall bring again Zion,'—bring back the hallowed days that are past, and which we are so desirous of seeing again." [1]

If I understand aright the argument of this speaker, it amounts to this: that if Christians were *in fact* "to maintain and advocate their religious convictions *with due forbearance and brotherly love*," these religious convictions would cease to be antagonistic, and consequently there would be no room for a resolution about "no compromise."

Melancthon.—The Conference itself was not altogether insensible to the force of these considerations. In testimony whereof I may refer you to the following resolution.

"That this Conference, while recognising the essential unity of the Christian Church, feel constrained to deplore its existing divisions, and to express their deep sense of the sinfulness involved in the alienation of affection by which they have been attended, and of the manifold evils which have resulted therefrom; and to avow their solemn conviction of the necessity and duty of taking measures, in humble dependence on the Divine blessing, towards

[1] Report of the Proceedings of the Conference held at Freemasons' Hall, London, from August 19th to September 2d inclusive, 1846. Published by order of the Conference. P. 197.

attaining a state of mind and feeling more in accordance with the word and spirit of Christ Jesus."[1]

Bellarmine.—You recollect the facts connected with the adoption of that resolution. One speaker, Rev. W. Anderson, "thought it deficient,—inasmuch as it made no provision for bringing Christians into more full agreement in the Truth;" and moved that an addition be made to it as follows: "And to seek that God, of His infinite mercy, may pour forth more abundantly of His Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of truth, of love, and of holiness, that all the churches may be brought into a nearer conformity to the Word of God in all things, that the friends of the Redeemer may be thoroughly united in Truth and Love."[2] This amendment was seconded by Rev. James Begg, who said: "The resolution as it now stood is decidedly defective. In the first part, the existence of divisions in the Christian Church is deplored, and I think justly; and, wherever these divisions exist, there is culpability; wherever they are there is sin somewhere. They did not exist in the church of Christ from the first; they are not in the Word of God; but they arise from human sinfulness. Therefore the resolution, most properly, deplores, not only the alienation of affection arising from these divisions, but the divisions themselves: but herein it is defective, since it merely aims at the removal of the alienation of the affection, without aiming, in any measure, at the removal of the divisions themselves."[3] Dr Morison replied: "He was certain that neither the Committee nor the Conference would have thought it sufficient, had not the idea referred to been contained in it: but he believed

[1] Abstract, &c., p. 7 [2] Report, &c., p. 59. [3] Ib. p. 60.

it would be found in the last line but one of the resolution as proposed by the Committee—'towards attaining a *state of mind* and feeling more in accordance with the spirit of Christ Jesus?'"[1] With this understanding the resolution was adopted, with a slight addition to bring out more fully the meaning—"towards attaining a state of mind and feeling more in accordance with the *word* and spirit of Christ Jesus."

Taking then the resolution as it stands, and more especially looking at it in the light of this commentary, does the Evangelical Alliance mean to tell the world, that it is consistent with their other resolution formerly adduced? While "no compromise of the views of any member, or sanction of those of others, on the points wherein they differ, is either required or expected," what sort of "measures" can they take, individually or socially, "towards attaining a state of mind more in accordance with the word of Christ Jesus?" What do they mean by "avowing their solemn conviction of the necessity and duty of taking such measures, in humble dependence on the Divine blessing?" Have any such measures been taken?

Lord Herbert.—If these things be so, the former resolution ought to have run in some such terms as these:—

That whereas the members of this Alliance entertain conflicting views on several important topics, it is required and expected that each member, under a solemn conviction of the necessity and duty of doing so, shall seek, in humble dependence on the Divine blessing, to bring his own views into harmony with "the word and spirit of Christ Jesus," so that the views of all the members may thus

[1] Report, &c., p. 60.

be brought into harmony with each other; and thus truth be no longer compromised, as, alas! it has been so frequently and painfully. After joining this Alliance, its members cannot be held free to maintain and advocate all their religious convictions as heretofore, because so many of these religious convictions are palpably erroneous, and because an intelligent being, such as man, and especially a redeemed and regenerated man, such as a Christian professes himself to be, cannot be held free to maintain and advocate what is erroneous and unscriptural under any pretence whatever.

Such a resolution would have been like a bomb-shell on the platform of the Alliance.

Melancthon.—These sentiments were not generally entertained, and your proposal is utterly impracticable. One Doctor in speaking remarked: "He had at one moment some misapprehensions. He thought he saw something like a cloud gathering; but he thanked God it was dispersed. The key-note had again been given—the right note,—and they now all understood each other. They were not come to ascertain and decide upon the merits of Episcopacy, or of Presbyterianism, or of Dissent, or of Wesleyanism, a system which might, perhaps, be found to occupy a different position from all the rest. They came not to surrender any thing which they conscientiously maintained. They met without compromise—without violating any one honest conviction of their minds. It was now clear, that unity might exist with diversity; and *that*, because, if they differed on five points, they agreed on five hundred." [1]

[1] Dr Newton, Liverpool Conference, p. 30.

Lord Herbert.—You surely will not deny that schism and division depend much more upon the *nature* of your differences, than upon their *number*. While it is obvious, from your own remarks, that even the five points of difference which are acknowledged to exist, are of a somewhat inflammable material, since the very idea of meeting "to ascertain and decide upon their merits," was like a thunder cloud on your horizon: Is it really "*a honest conviction of your mind*," that the opposite sides on each of these five points are both right? Is it the "honest conviction of your mind," that it matters not whether yourself or your brother remain in error? Can you ask the world to believe in your brotherly love towards each other, when the very mention of meeting to ascertain and decide upon the merits of your respective peculiarities, inspires a nervous trepidation? Your own language tempts me to speak of your association as "a holiday union," "a platform union." For so long as this Alliance is made the means, as it has often been, not only of proclaiming afresh the existence of your denominational conflicts, but also of asserting in reference to *both* sides their strict conscientiousness in these very party collisions, intelligent men will smile at your simplicity.

Bellarmine.—Such strange sentiments as have now been commented on were not uttered by some members of the Alliance, without being *satisfactorily* refuted, though only *indirectly*, by other members. For example, Dr Buchanan of Glasgow is reported to have said at one of the meetings,—"In truth, the very idea of the unity of the Church of Christ had been wellnigh lost. Professing Christians, yea, true Christians, had forgotten that they

had one Lord, and one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who was above all, and through all, and in them all. And I repeat, the humble, but high and glorious aim of this proposed Evangelical Alliance, is to bring the Church humbly and prayerfully to meditate upon these things. True, indeed, in our Alliance, in fulfilling this our commission, we do not renounce any of those points in which we continue to disagree; but, Sir, I am sure I can say for every member of that Conference, we glory not in them. We must look upon them as evidences of the remaining blindness and perversity of our hearts and minds." Mark especially the words that follow. "On these points there is truth, as well as in those greater matters in which we are agreed; and our blessed hope is, that just by our agreement in the greater truths, and the love towards each other which these truths have begotten, and are cherishing in our souls, we shall be enabled with a single eye, and therefore a whole body full of light, to look to those other things; so that while up to the points whereunto we have attained, we are now walking by the same rule, and minding the same things; we are trusting that even in those matters in which we are still otherwise minded, God will yet reveal even these unto us."[1]

Melancthon.—"It was felt and allowed that important diversities of sentiment exist among those who give every evidence of sincere discipleship; and it was also felt that it would be a happy day which witnessed the melting of these diversities into a blessed unanimity. But then it was equally acknowledged that some other things must first be effected, and it was for one of these anterior things

[1] Dr Massie's vol. pp. 234, 235.

that the Conference had now assembled. It was not met for the discussion of dogmas, but for the diffusion of brotherly love. It was not to sit as a reconciler of conflicting sentiments, but as the restorer of ancient affections. It did not arbitrate denominational differences, but it sought the outlet and increase of Christian charity. It rejoiced to find that the points were many and momentous on which all present agreed; but it neither said that the points on which they dissented were trivial, nor that these disagreements could be discussed and settled there. It allowed that all the members might be equally sincere in their creed, and honest in their peculiarities; and not wishing any man to abandon his convictions till he could abandon them *conscientiously*, it left all to keep intact and inviolate their respective opinions, till the flow of mutual love had increased their common Christianity." [1]

Lord Herbert.—It seems to me somewhat difficult to heap together more confusion in the same space, than is found in this flowing paragraph. First,—It is admitted to be a happy day which shall witness the melting of diversities into a blessed unanimity, and it is acknowledged that the Alliance is to attempt one of those things which must be effected before the realization of this blessed unanimity, and we suppose, with a view to it. Now the Alliance, instead of making the attainment of this "blessed unanimity" one of its objects, has, as we shall shew, *positively refused* to do so; and has taken up a position, on its "no compromise" principle, antagonistic to that unanimity. Secondly, if by "dogmas" be meant the empty themes of

[1] An Address on behalf of the London Branch of the Provisional Committee, 1845, p. 7.

logomachy, then who ever pretended that the discussion of such would promote "the diffusion of brotherly love?" But if by "dogmas" be meant doctrines, *truths*, then the Evangelical Alliance itself has confessed that it could not move one step in the diffusion of brotherly love, till some such dogmas were discussed, or settled without discussion. Thirdly, "the restorer of ancient affections" is both blear-eyed and lame, unless he be at the same time "a reconciler of conflicting sentiments." Fourthly, denominational differences constitute a great dam that closes the floodgates of Christian love, how then can the Alliance seek intelligently "the outlet and increase of Christian charity," and politely decline to "arbitrate denominational differences?" Lastly, it is implied that convictions may be abandoned, when this can be done *conscientiously*. I am not unwilling to risk the whole argument on the answer to this one question: Can the *same* conviction be conscientiously adopted, and by and bye conscientiously abandoned? If such be the nature of *religious* conscientiousness, save me from its snare.

Bellarmine.—*Protestant* conscientiousness, if you please. The conscience that submits to the infallible Church is rescued from such tergiversation. We thank the Evangelical Alliance for "allowing all its members to be equally sincere in their creed, and honest in their peculiarities," and thus "leaving all to keep intact and inviolate their respective opinions" for an indefinite period. The Alliance is thereby stereotyping every Protestant error, and becoming itself a buttress to every Protestant schism. What has any one to fear from a hundred-headed monster, whose heads are opposing and counterworking one another?

Melancthon.—It is altogether an unwarranted assertion that the Evangelical Alliance is doing aught to stereotype prevailing errors, or has *positively refused* to embrace among its objects the attainment of unanimity of sentiment. At the very first meeting of the great London Conference, the chairman, Sir C. E. Smith, in his opening address, said, "Brethren, there is another delightful feeling in my mind to-day, and that is, that, if we succeed in this experiment, the Church will be entering upon a new course. It is the first experiment which has been made to combine together the interests of *Truth* and of *Love.* In former times endeavours have been made to maintain the interests of Truth; but never yet has there been a systematic endeavour to combine the interests of Truth and those of Love,—as I hope they will be combined on this occasion." [1]

Lord Herbert.—Has the Alliance, then, succeeded *as an experiment, to combine the interests of Truth and of Love?* The second resolution defining its objects, runs thus:—"That the great object of the Evangelical Alliance be, to aid in manifesting, as far as practicable, the unity which exists amongst the true disciples of Christ; to promote their union by fraternal and devotional intercourse," &c. An amendment was proposed and seconded that the last quoted clause should stand thus: "to promote their union *in judgment and affection* by fraternal and devotional intercourse." This amendment was put and negatived; but when the assembly divided the numbers are never given in the Report of the Conference. One of the speakers who opposed the amendment said:

[1] Report, &c. p. 5.

"If you adopt it, you completely alter the whole character of the Alliance. Unity in judgment is most desirable: but the great object of the Evangelical Alliance is, to promote union and love, in spite of differences in judgment. If you say, that the great object is to promote union and judgment, it may be right; but it is not what we mean." [1]

On the same occasion the following was proposed for adoption:—"That a further object of the Evangelical Alliance be, to promote, as far as in them lies, a more extensive agreement of views, as it regards those parts of their Lord's will concerning which the brethren united in this Confederation at present differ; and that this end be sought,—not by any attempt on the part of some of the brethren to impose their views on others of the brethren, nor by erecting among themselves any tribunal for the determination of matters of doctrine and discipline: but, First, by cherishing individually a just sense of their need of a more perfect knowledge of the will of their Divine Redeemer: Secondly, by earnest, believing, united, and persevering prayer and supplication for 'the Spirit of Truth,' to 'guide them into all Truth;' and, Thirdly, by mutual conference from time to time, as suitable opportunities may arise." [2] This motion was put and negatived; the state of the vote is not recorded.

Bellarmine.—It is undeniable, then, that the Alliance has deliberately and distinctly *rejected* a proposal "to combine the interests of Truth and those of Love." She has drawn her sword against every error of those outside

[1] Rev. W. W. Ewbank, Report, &c. p. 232.

[2] Rev. R. W. Overbury, ib. p. 234. See also pp. 352, 355.

her pale, and thrown her shield over every error of those within her pale! She cannot make error infallible; but she has done what she could to make Protestant errors immutable!

Melancthon.—"I think our brethren must feel," said one, "that, as a matter of practical wisdom and common prudence, it is not wise to commit ourselves to a resolution, which would set five hundred gentlemen of different opinions discussing *ad infinitum*." [1]

Lord Herbert.—Will it require discussions *ad infinitum* to come to an agreement as to what your "Lord's will" really is? The same speaker said on another occasion: "Discussions await us to-day. Let us not be too sensitive about them. It seems to me to be a decided benefit that we should go through them. Did we entertain opposite opinions, and had we no opportunity of comparing them, but were under the necessity of carrying them back with us to our various places of abode; they would ferment in our minds, and become sources of future discord of the most serious kind. But, if every one speaks his mind, so that everything erroneous may be met, and everything sound acceded to, we are laying the foundations deep for permanent Union." [2]

Bellarmine.—If we have cause to rejoice at the course which the Alliance has pursued, some of its own friends will be bitterly disappointed. Those, for example, must grieve, who sympathised with M. Vernet when he remarked:—"It has been said, that one intended action of this Alliance will be to resist Popery. But it will also have operations of a different kind; and the most important in the esti-

[1] Report, &c. pp. 236, 237. [2] Report, &c. p. 272.

mation of some, will be, the action it will have on our own hearts. It is a sort of sword, which God has put into our own hands; but we must turn it against ourselves; and, by its means, destroy those evil habits and antipathies, by which we are often set in opposition one to another." [1]

Theophilus.—If evangelical Christians cannot meet together to discuss their differences in a forbearing and friendly temper of mind, how can they expect the world to believe in their professions of mutual affection? If it be indeed true, that mutual conferences by the members of the Evangelical Alliance, to promote a more extensive agreement of views in regard to their Lord's will, "be incompatible with the grand object," and would be felt "to embarrass the movement," then most assuredly is that Alliance beside the mark, and will ultimately prove a signal failure, judged by its professed aim. If that aim be Christian Union *in an intelligible and scriptural sense*, such mutual conferences, instead of being regarded "as hazardous," would be felt to be absolutely necessary; and would be hailed and enjoyed by right minded men as scenes of sympathy as deep, of affection as intense, of faith as strong, as were ever experienced in hearing the most eloquent addresses or in uniting in the most ardent prayers. The Alliance, as it is constituted, is Christian love in *profession;* these mutual conferences would be Christian love in *action.* It were easy to mismanage such conferences, as it is easy to spoil the finest mechanism; and the finer it is, the more easily it is marred.

Let them be entered upon after suitable preparation; let each party try to dismiss prejudice, and devoutly and

[1] Report, &c. p. 53.

diligently re-examine the point to be discussed; and let the meetings be conducted in a holy humble temper of heart. "To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." If *such* conferences be indeed impracticable in the present age, or after trial be found unsuccessful and unprofitable, then the immediate prospects of Christian union, we fear, are but indifferent. If the men of this generation have not faith enough to gird up their loins to fight the giants of sectarianism that are in possession of the land,—if they quail at the very thought of subduing our denominational differences, — and will not, through sheer dread, even look their foes in the face then they must be content to leave their bones in the wilderness, as unworthy to enter and possess the promised Canaan of Christian Unity. But let them know that God will raise up unto himself a people better than their fathers. For when men shall come together to confer about their conflicting views of what the Bible enjoins, and shall compare their respective opinions with each other, in the presence of the Divine Majesty, and under the shadow of the Redeemer's cross, believing in the fiery baptism of the Holy Ghost, yearning over a divided Church and a perishing world, and anticipating the day when all shall stand together before the great white throne, they will soon begin to see the mountains of separation shaking, and removing, preparatory to being cast into the sea. Such conferences would as surely issue in rich and manifold and unexpected blessings, as the return of spring sends gladness over the earth.

II.—*Is the Evangelical Alliance a Church?*

Theophilus.—We have already found reason to affirm, that terms of Christian communion on earth are not to be considered as identical with the terms of personal and everlasting salvation. Has the Evangelical Alliance acted or not on this principle?

Melancthon.—They have undoubtedly proceeded on this principle. They do not unchristianize those who decline to unite with them.

Lord Herbert.—Admitting that the Alliance has taken up the right position as regards this topic, these three things are worthy of notice:—1. There was marked and weighty opposition to this view being carried, on the part of many leading members of the London Conference. 2. In so far as the Alliance holds and acts upon this principle, so far is she precisely what the Church, it is said, ought to be. 3. But in carrying out this principle of being a society based upon, and testifying for *truth*, she has not attempted on any definite principle to say what is the amount of truth for which she ought to testify, and the truth for which she does profess to testify is regarded by many of her friends as both meagre in extent and loose in expression.

Bellarmine.—Here, then, is an illustration, that this Alliance has its members bound together more by an outward uniformity than in an inward union. And I rejoice to understand that so many within its bosom still adhere to the doctrine of our Church, that the terms of Christian communion are the very terms of salvation itself. On these our hopes do rest.

Melancthon.—The principle on which the Alliance acted was thus explained by Mr Bickersteth:—"What then," he said, "has been the general plan which has guided our minds in compiling this summary of principles? It was this—that it should be general enough to include the great proportion of real Christians; *not all* real Christians, for this was impossible, without sacrificing important truths which ought, we believed, to be confessed." [1]

Lord Herbert.—If *one* real Christian may be excluded by confessing one truth, why may not *another* real Christian be excluded in order to confess another truth?

Melancthon.—"All will see and feel, that there are truths more or less vital in the divine word; some of which may be held in due subordination,—the less to the greater,—the secondary to the primary,—things important in themselves, to things essential. It is on this principle that the resolution is proposed." [2]

Lord Herbert.—Are there then some truths which you may sacrifice in order to include a greater number of members in your Alliance? If your association is based on the principle of including real Christians, it ought to include *them all;* but if it be based on the principle of testifying for the truth, it ought to testify for *all the truth that it knows.* As Dr Cox of New York said:—"I am bound as a Christian, as a member of this Alliance, and more, as a minister of Christ, to tell men, with the voice of a trumpet that gives no uncertain sound, the difference between truth and error—between Christianity and a mistake. . . .

[1] Report of the London Conference, p. 78. [2] Ib. p. 78.

It is necessary to take truth as good enough for every man."[1]

Bellarmine.—By professing to testify for *some* revealed truth, but not for *all* revealed truth, the Evangelical Alliance is herself acting on the principle of *reserve*, which Protestants have so often and so strongly reprobated, at least in words. By this proceeding she also enervates her testimony even so far as it does extend; as was remarked by one:—"I do not attach so much importance as some members of the Conference do to this basis; just because I have felt, that while there are differences amongst us, any testimony we can bear to truth must be, to a large extent, defective."[2]

Theophilus.—In so far then as the Evangelical Alliance is a witness for truth, it agrees with what the Christian *Church* ought to be. To settle the question before us,—Is the Alliance a church?—it will be necessary to inquire, Who are its members, and what are its objects?

Melancthon.—It was settled by the Conference at London,—"That this Alliance is not to be considered as an alliance of denominations, or branches of the Church, but of individual Christians, each acting on his own responsibility."[3]

Lord Herbert.—Was it necessary to state so formally, that it was not "an alliance of denominations?" An alliance of denominations *as they at present exist!* You might as soon mix oil and water and quicksilver permanently together. Pray, what is a church, if it be not an alliance,

[1] Report, &c. pp. 88, 89.

[2] Dr Cunningham, Report, &c. p. 101.

[3] Abstract, &c. p. 7.

or society, "of individual Christians, each acting on his own responsibility?"

Melancthon.—"I think it is exceedingly difficult strictly to define a Church of Christ; for there is a meaning of the Church, in which I should be very sorry to deny that we are a church; because I know that, wherever two or three are met together in the name of Christ, there is our Lord and Saviour in the midst of them."[1] "I avow my conviction, that there is no such thing as a visible Church."[2]

Bellarmine.—Well, I know, that the nineteenth article of the Church of England says:—"The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men." Now, I should very much like to have an answer to this question,—What qualifications ought to be required from a member of the visible Church of Christ, which are not required from a member of the Evangelical Alliance? Or, What qualifications are required of a member of the Evangelical Alliance, which ought not to be required of a member of the visible Church of Christ?

Melancthon.—Well, I do not know that the Evangelical Alliance itself has directly answered this question. It does not unchristianize those who do not enrol their names on its register; but it always supposes that only those who are members of the Church of Christ are fit to be members of the Alliance.

Lord Herbert.—Is it not its professed design to embrace as many as possible, if not all, the members of the Christian Church?

Melancthon.—Undoubtedly. "In the character, simply,

[1] Rev. W. W. Ewbank, Report, &c. p. 203.

[2] Hon. and Rev. B. Noel, ib. p. 207.

of believers, lowly and spiritual followers of the Lamb of God, are we to recognise one another in this Evangelical Alliance; and it is never once to be asked, as to any influence the inquiry may have upon our mutual love, what church we belong to, or whether we belong to any church at all. We are not about to form an ecclesiastical institute, a church incorporation, or a confederation of churches; but, overlooking all ecclesiastical distinctions, we fix upon Christian character, the elements of vital and experimental godliness, as, at once, the only, and the necessary, prerequisites to the fellowship we desire to realise." [1]

Bellarmine.—If anything else besides "Christian character," "the elements of vital and experimental godliness," and conduct consistent therewith, be necessary to membership in any "ecclesiastical institute or church incorporation," such institute, or such incorporation, is not a church according to the New Testament and the Thirty-nine Articles.

Lord Herbert.—You have said, that it is "in the character, simply, of believers, lowly and spiritual followers of the Lamb of God, you are to recognise one another in this Evangelical Alliance." In what other character do you, or ought you, to recognise one another in "the visible Church of Christ?" If the Alliance be not a church, tell us wherein it differs from a church. If it be a church, let it be called by its right name.

Melancthon.—It was determined by the Conference which assembled in London,—"That it is not contemplated that this Alliance should assume or aim at the character of a new ecclesiastical organization, claiming and

[1] Dr Steane, Liverpool Conference, p. 41.

exercising the functions of a Christian church. Its simple and comprehensive object, it is strongly felt, may be successfully promoted without interfering with, or disturbing the order of, any branch of the Christian Church to which its members may respectively belong." [1]

Lord Herbert.—This is no answer to the plain question that was proposed. Besides, if there had been in existence any "ecclesiastical organization," which was found "claiming and exercising the functions of a Christian church" *rightfully and scripturally*, would there have been any occasion, or any room, for this Evangelical Alliance? Is it not most undeniably and palpably the fact, that the Alliance has been called forth, because the existing ecclesiastical organizations, by their claims and their proceedings, are regarded as neglecting or perverting to a great extent the functions of a Christian church?

Bellarmine.—The Alliance may not be a "new" ecclesiastical organization of the same sort as the old Protestant ones, but it may be one of another sort, equally bad. If your denominational churches were churches, in the proper sense of the word, the institution of the Evangelical Alliance would have been irrelevant—a work of supererogation. To inaugurate that association, then, instead of making your *professed* churches *real* churches—such as they ought to be, is attempting to serve God, while setting aside His plan and mode of service, and resorting to a self-devised scheme of your own. If this Alliance be not a church *professedly and nominally*, it *really and truly* embraces the most essential element of a church. But let us hear what "its simple and comprehensive object" is, that

[1] Abstract, &c. p. 8.

we may judge whether or not it "may be successfully promoted without interfering with, or disturbing the order of, any branch of the Christian Church."

Melancthon.—This is stated in the following words:—"That the members of this Conference are deeply convinced of the desirableness of forming a confederation, on the basis of great evangelical principles held in common by them, which may afford opportunity to members of the Church of Christ of cultivating brotherly love, enjoying Christian intercourse, and promoting such other objects as they may hereafter agree to prosecute together; and they hereby proceed to form such a confederation, under the name of 'The Evangelical Alliance.'"[1]

Lord Herbert.—What is the basis of any Protestant church, professedly at least, but these same great evangelical principles?

Bellarmine.—We are now told authoritatively that "the simple and comprehensive object" of the Alliance, is to "afford opportunity to members of the Church of Christ of cultivating brotherly love, enjoying Christian intercourse," &c. Did the Lord Jesus Christ not institute His Church for the express purpose here specified? Has the Church, *as instituted by Christ*, failed in affording sufficient opportunity for the accomplishment of one of its own chief designs? If not, to establish a novel confederation in order to secure the very same object, is to dishonour, surely, the original institution of our Lord and Master. This statement of the design of the Alliance obviously implies, what is an undeniable fact, that the Protestant churches in their present condition do not

[1] Abstract, &c. p. 7.

afford the opportunity here specified, but rather create drawbacks and impediments to the free flow of Christian fellowship and sympathy.

In these circumstances, what does this Evangelical Alliance, judging it by its own professions and principles, step forth to accomplish? It first attempts to throw a veil of concealment, and even a shield of defence, over the sad corruptions and direful schisms whose existence it dare not deny, owing to them indeed its own origination. This it does by proclaiming "no compromise" as its watchword, and also by distinctly disavowing every intention, even the most remote, "to interfere with, or disturb the order of," the churches as they are at present constituted and administered, impure and woeful though their condition be. And, secondly, while loudly and emphatically protesting that the Alliance is no church, and shall exercise none of the functions of the Church, it really and virtually constitutes itself, as the Church is, or should be constituted, assumes not a few of the Church's privileges, and takes up several of the Church's primary and most weighty engagements. The Alliance, indeed, is not a church, but it is an unauthorised and defective substitute for the Church. It is a plausible and showy contrivance, whose actual influence will prove somewhat different from what its originators intended and its supporters desire. It is a strong and skilful outwork of defence to the schismatic Protestant camp; and while it lasts, the quarrels of that camp will be prolonged, and its divisions consolidated and extended.

Melancthon.—It is going too far to say that the Alliance disavows every intention to disturb the existing state of denominations. For example, Mr Ewbank said:—"If

there be anything positively wrong in the order of any church,—anything positively opposed to the command of Christ, then, I hope, this Alliance will, indirectly, at least, interfere with that church." [1] And Dr King remarked: "Our work is *Union:* but I just as firmly believe as earnestly hope, that one of its effects will be *Incorporation.* We meet to shake hands across the partition-walls: and the agreement is, that the partition-wall is not to be disturbed. But when we shake hands, what if the partition-wall will not bear shaking? What if, in some cases, it begins to yield and bend, and fall, and disappear, and leave nothing but the recollection, to fill us with shame for causeless differences that are gone, and make us grateful to God for succeeding identification." [2]

Lord Herbert.—These sentiments were materially modified, if not expressly controverted, by other speakers. And it is for these gentlemen themselves to reconcile the opinions which have been just quoted as theirs, with the part which they took in organising the Alliance such as it is.

Melancthon.—It is certainly a mistake to suppose that the members of the Alliance were indifferent to the prevailing anomalies in the Protestant Church. Mr Bickersteth has well said:—"It is a humbling and affecting thought that those blessed appointments of Divine mercy and love (the Christian ministry and the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper), which were specially intended to gather the Church of Christ together, and establish and promote the unity of his people, to baptise them into the one name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

[1] Report, &c. p. 204. [2] Ib. p. 205.

and to give them the communion of one body and one blood, that they might manifestly be one, have, through our blindness and corruption, been abused to divide and separate faithful Christians."[1]

Bellarmine.—If these words do not libel your denominational Christianity, what ought Protestants to do, if they be really desirous to set matters right? Does not the only straightforward mode of proceeding consist, in *ceasing to abuse* "these blessed appointments of divine mercy and love?" To have set about doing so would have been good and valid evidence to all men, that Protestants were repenting of their "blindness and corruption." Whereas to institute a new-fashioned confederation, which, while proclaiming in several ways the general prevalence of this shameful and inveterate abuse, protests against the smallest direct effort to rectify it, and proposes to accomplish by a merely human plan the very end which this acknowledged abuse of the Divine plan defeats, is certainly something not unlike a denser blindness and a more intense corruption.

Melancthon.—It should never be forgotten that the members of the Alliance have always proceeded upon the principle, of simply seeking to make manifest a union which already existed. "If we were to define," said one, "the object of our meeting, and then keep it before us, it would facilitate our movements. The object is a simple one. First of all, it must be kept in mind that, apart from the essential union which exists among the godly, we do not look for union beyond a particular point. We have no idea of interfering with denominational peculiari-

[1] Dr Massie's volume, p. 365.

ties. But it so happens, that a vital and essential union positively exists among all God's real children. There is an agreement on certain great principles which unite their hearts. And if we can just gather these up, and thus embody a union which, in matter of fact, already exists, the great difficulty is over—so far as a basis is concerned. We have not first to set that basis forth, and then to persuade one another to adopt it; but we have rather to retire into ourselves, and see what are the points on which we do agree. There are peculiarities, which every one will feel to be peculiarities." [1]

Lord Herbert.—This is overlooking the real point of the question, which may be stated thus:—Are not these "denominational peculiarities," which "every one feels to be peculiarities," and of *interfering with which there is not even an idea,* both a serious drawback to your present union such as it really is, and almost a death-blow to an unambiguous and full manifestation of Christian union? Since it is notorious that your denominational peculiarities not only enervate and damage such union as does now exist among you, but also render its public manifestation next to impossible, it follows that the formation of this anomalous Alliance is not the proper way either to tighten the bonds of your mutual union, or to evince its existence openly to the world.

Melancthon.—"The *great object,* majestic for its simplicity, yet unattractive to worldly minds for its spirituality; the great object often lost sight of amidst the clouds and noise of controversy, and unappreciated because not enjoyed, and because as a thing of heaven

[1] Dr Young, Liverpool Conference, p. 9.

hardly fit to be clothed in words of flesh; more an ethereal, spiritual, and invisible element, than any other of the bonds of Christian brotherhood; the great object of the Evangelical Alliance, to which it was becoming that every other design should be subordinated, has been described to be 'to aid in manifesting, as far as practicable, the unity which exists amongst the true disciples of Christ.'"[1]

Bellarmine.—But is not this a very lame conclusion, if it be indeed a fact, that "the unity which exists amongst the true disciples of Christ," is very far short of what *ought to* be, and *might be*, found existing among them? Besides, the conclusion is lamer still, if this "great object" is pursued in a manner clearly illegitimate and suicidal, by virtually superseding the method of manifesting unity, which is enjoined in Holy Scripture and is agreeable to the nature of the case, namely, church organization. Furthermore, if this be indeed *the great object* of the Evangelical Alliance, it seems to me to have outwitted itself by extending a silent sanction and semi-official patronage to those very denominational peculiarities, which are at once the bane of any union that may already exist amongst its members, as well as an insuperable impediment to the full growth and development of that union, and also an extinguisher to its visible manifestation.

Melancthon.—Notwithstanding every subtle objection and metaphysical juggle that can be urged against the Evangelical Alliance, it is a noble institution and substantially right. What Christian heart does not thrill a response to such a resolution as the following:—

[1] Dr Massie, p. 369 of his vol.

"That, inasmuch as this proposal for Union originated, in a great degree, in the sense very generally entertained among Christians, of their grievous practical neglect of our Lord's 'new commandment' to his disciples, to 'love one another,' in which offence the members of the Alliance desire, with godly sorrow, to acknowledge their full participation; it ought to form one chief object of the Alliance to deepen in the minds of its own members, and, through their influence, to extend among the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ generally, that conviction of sin and shortcoming in this respect, which the blessed Spirit of God seems to be awakening throughout his Church; in order that, humbling themselves more and more before the Lord, they may be stirred up to make full confession of their guilt at all suitable times, and to implore, through the merits and intercession of their merciful Head and Saviour, forgiveness of their past offences, and Divine grace to lead them to the better cultivation of that brotherly affection which is enjoined upon all who, loving the Lord Jesus Christ, are bound also to love one another, for the truth's sake which dwelleth in them."[1]

Theophilus.—We would allude to these solemn statements with all reverence and all humility; but for the Truth's sake we cannot refrain. They do not seem to us to contain a "*full* confession of guilt." These acknowledgments proceed upon the supposition, that no guilt of schism attaches to the Protestant community, except what is involved in the tardy formation of this Alliance and the *personal* alienation of individual Christians. Judging of this expression of "godly sorrow," in connection with the

[1] Abstract, &c., p. 9.

principles and proceedings of the Alliance, there seems to us to be a silent, but emphatic *denial* of any sectarianism in the constitutions of our various denominations. That our denominational churches are for the most part *schismatically constituted*, has never, so far as we are aware, been expressly or formally denied by the Alliance. We have seen it denied now and again by some individual members; whose views on that point have been shewn, we think, to be inconsistent and unscriptural. The Alliance in its collective capacity, has shrunk, as well they might, from *avowedly* committing themselves to the hazardous opinion, that there is nothing essentially schismatic and unchristian in our endless ecclesiastical organizations. They have, nevertheless, by their studied silence on this vital topic, and their profession of making a *full* acknowledgment of transgression, virtually and substantially avowed that there is no "sin and shortcoming" in our ceaseless sects themselves; and that all that is needed, in their judgment, for "the better cultivation of that brotherly affection which is enjoined upon all who, loving the Lord Jesus Christ, are bound also to love one another, for the truth's sake which dwelleth in them," is simply to work diligently the machinery of the Evangelical Alliance, and "love one another" over the party-walls of our sectarianism,—forgetting or denying that these party-walls are nothing but revolutionary barricades in the "city of truth," which, so far as this Alliance is concerned, may stand untouched for ever.

The Evangelical Alliance may, indeed, reiterate her declarations that she has nothing whatever to do with our denominational partition-walls,—that, as she is not called

either to defend or assail them, she will simply let them alone. But assuming such a position as this, in her circumstances, is a shallow pretence. For she has been constrained by certain influences seriously to abjure every attempt and intention even to attack or shake or approach these walls of separation. Again and again has she pledged herself, that, within the range of her direct activities, denominational peculiarities shall ever be regarded as a sort of *preserve* sacred from intrusion. And yet, we have found reason to affirm, that our ecclesiastical segregations are, in fact, some of the ripest fruits of discord, yielding a concentrated essence of schism and strife. Consequently, if the Evangelical Alliance would prove true to her own better principles, and *would not falter at the difficulties before her*, her chief business would lie with these very segregations, and her more immediate object should be, not so much to dilute the poison, as to uproot the tree from which it is distilled. Moreover, if confession of sin must be *full* in order to be acceptable, and if it must be followed by immediate and unswerving amendment, that it may not become an awful mockery, let the Evangelical Alliance come before the world and deliberately declare, that there is no schism in the denominational frame-work of Protestant Churches; or, if she cannot and will not make this open declaration, let her cease forthwith to put a finger to the work of Christian Union, of whose first principles she thus acknowledges herself to be profoundly ignorant; or, what would be best of all, let her recast her confession of sin and shortcoming, and reform the plan of her operations. Let the world know whether our denominational inclosures are schismatical or not. If they are

not, and if conscientious Christians may multiply denominational variety, as clever connoisseurs multiply the shapes and shades and patterns of fashion, then, indeed, has the Evangelical Alliance mistaken its vocation, and sounded a false alarm to Christendom. But if there is to be, and ought to be only, "one fold," as there is but "one shepherd," then let the unauthorised and party-fences which separate the sheep, and disfigure the pasturage, and displease the great Lord of all, be assailed immediately with the weapons of Truth and of the Bible; and let the Evangelical Alliance be the first to strike the blow.

Melancthon.—This is misunderstanding the design of the Alliance altogether. Please to give due attention to its own well weighed statements. "That the great object of the Evangelical Alliance be, to aid in manifesting, as far as practicable, the unity which exists amongst the true disciples of Christ; to promote their union by fraternal and devotional intercourse; to discourage all envyings, strifes, and divisions; to impress upon Christians a deeper sense of the great duty of obeying their Lord's command to 'love one another;' and to seek the full accomplishment of His prayer: 'that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.'"[1]

Theophilus.—We never heard of any one who distinctly professed to believe, that "the *full* accomplishment" of our Lord's prayer now quoted, is compatible in any sense with the continuance and integrity of the exist-

[1] Abstract, &c., p. 9.

ing ecclesiastical organizations. Besides, as it is generally admitted that the prevalence of schism called forth the Evangelical Alliance, it is a natural inference, that the Alliance will cease to be, when schism shall have been exterminated from the Church of Christ.

Now it is doing no violence to the language of the resolution before us, to suppose that the Alliance is a church. The language rather suggests such an idea. It seems to us, as has been already remarked, that it is one of the peculiar and *indefeasible* functions of the Church to make "manifest the unity of Christ's true disciples." What occasion then for a new device "to aid" this manifestation? Not certainly because the original constitution of the Church is defective in this point; but because that original constitution, suitable and adequate though it be, is now under a practical abeyance and suspension. Not to return without delay to that constitution, seeking to be conformed to it in all its integrity and beauty, but to invent a remedy of our own for the evils under which we are groaning by the injuries done to that very constitution, is to attempt to cure one disease by inducing another, or to cover an old transgression by committing a fresh offence. We might suppose the orginators of the Alliance to be too wise to fall into such a mistake; and that their design was neither more nor less than to revert to the primitive and New Testament model of the Church. This charitable supposition, however, is rudely dispelled by unwelcome facts.

Because, if the Alliance has for its "great object," "to promote the union of the true disciples of Christ by fraternal and devotional intercourse;" and "to seek the full

accomplishment of Christ's prayer,—'That they all may be one,'" &c.; there are only two ways in which this object can possibly be attained. In the first place, the Alliance may constitute itself a church, and grow, and prosper, till it shall become the one only universal Church. Or, secondly, the Alliance may exercise such an influence upon existing churches as shall persuade them to unite and form one church. If the Alliance adopted the former mode, it must try to sweep away before it existing institutions, and consigning them to their place among the rubbish of the past, endeavour to occupy their room to better purpose. If the Alliance were to follow the second plan, it must aim at removing, or causing to be removed, sectarian landmarks, and mountains of prejudice, so as to fill up the valleys between one party and another,—and it must labour to straighten what is crooked and smooth what is rough, in our denominational polities. Now, it is remarkable that the Evangelical Alliance refuses to take either of these plans for the accomplishment of her object. She professes to seek the realisation of Christian Union in its full and scriptural sense, and at the same time disavows the use of the very means by which alone that union can be accomplished. She is not to be regarded as a church, where the scattered and distracted disciples might rally, and recognise each other, and avow and seal their union; neither will she lay her hand upon one of those many and unscriptural innovations and traditions, by which the disciples are thrown into confusion and discord, and the Church of Christ rent into unnumbered pieces! She is wishing, and labouring, and praying, that God's children on earth may

be assembled in one happy household; but she is not to be considered the house where the alienated members of this noble family may embrace each other, never more to separate; nor will she move a step to repair and refit the old family mansion on its original homestead, among the dilapidations and ruins of which the children are often seen suspiciously and enviously watching each other! She is longing, and toiling, and interceding, that the sheep of the Good Shepherd may be, ere long, gathered together into one rich, green, and commodious fold; but she protests that she is not that fold, and that she cannot tell where it is, or how it is to be found; nor will she give her sanction or assistance to overthrow the divisions which she laments, and clear the ground of lumber, that the rain of heaven may fall on a prepared soil, and the wilderness begin to rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

III.—*The Organization of the Alliance.*

Melancthon.—The Evangelical Alliance is an association of Christians, who live not in one locality only, but in "many and remote parts of the world."

Lord Herbert.—An extensive, and especially an œcumenical, association cannot, in the nature of things, be one of individuals, but must be one of branch or affiliated associations.

Bellarmine.—And it seems undeniable, that on whatever principles an association of *individuals* is constructed, on the same principles should an association of *associations* be founded.

Melancthon.—Most certainly. We must seek not only

a union of individuals in one church, but also some visible and effective union among these local churches—"such a union as renders a member of one virtually a member of all; the whole of them in Judea and Samaria, in Asia and Europe—'from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum'—being linked together in one extensive and harmonious brotherhood; independent societies, yet acknowledging one another as 'all one in Christ Jesus;' separate flocks, each with its own appropriate pastors, but all the joint property and the constant and equal care of the 'Good Shepherd, who gave his life for the sheep.' Let us beware of running to an unscriptural extreme of so completely disuniting and insulating churches from one another, as to present to view a number of Christian societies, each in itself thoroughly organized, but without any bond or feeling of mutual connection; so, instead of the lovely harmony of reciprocal confidence and friendly intercourse, we should behold each church, like a separate fortress, surrounded with its walls and ramparts, with spies on the battlements, and sentinels at the gates, watching with anxious jealousy to prevent the entrance of intruders from the rest. If it be at all possible that any disciple of the Lord Jesus should relish such a state of things, or entertain a single wish for anything resembling it, let him never mention his desire to see Christians returning to primitive simplicity and apostolic order; for, in truth, that to which his wishes are directed is as unlike the condition of the churches in the times of the Apostles as division is to unity, or hatred and hostility to affection and peace. His desire, were it gratified, would realise a scene which we cannot too devoutly deprecate; and to

which it would be our duty to submit, 'no, not for an hour.'" [1]

Lord Herbert.—But is not this scene which you so deprecate precisely the one, that has been for so long a time presented by many different Christian denominations towards each other? Consequently these denominations in their present condition are standing in the way of such a union of churches as you have now described.

Bellarmine.—No one surely will maintain that the Evangelical Alliance, even though it were universally adhered to, is anything like a "return to primitive simplicity and apostolic order." We are not aware that the following sentiment, expressed by its historian, has been controverted by any of its supporters:—"If all the Churches of Christ were in a healthful and vigorous condition—if all Christians were enlightened, active, and consistent in their profession and discipleship—other agencies or combinations would not be required, either for the diffusion of the gospel, or the conversion of mankind; either for the promotion of Zion's peace and security, or for the exhibition and maintenance of fraternal communion and catholic unity. . . . The warmest friends and advocates of the Alliance look forward to, and wait for, a blessed and joyful consummation of such labours and associations; and, therefore, adhere to it as a temporary provision, which the wants of the world, and the shortcomings of the Church of Christ, have rendered expedient." [2]

Theophilus.—But the Alliance itself does not take this view of its own constitution. Evidence has been already

[1] Dr Wardlaw, Dr Massie's vol. p. 128.

[2] Dr Massie's vol. pp. 350, 351.

adduced, shewing that the Alliance has decidedly negatived the proposal of its being "a temporary provision," with a view to the amalgamation of churches. If the Alliance were, indeed, simply *a provisional expedient* to secure the accomplishment of a scriptural union, enough has been advanced, from time to time, to prove that its motto, "no compromise," should be exchanged for some other, such as "denominational demolition." And instead of professing to be "no church," it ought to aim either at effecting, or at itself becoming, "a union of churches."

Melancthon.—But this is to misunderstand the question of Christian union altogether. "We lay the basis of the unity of the Church in the unity of the faith; and that faith we find in the reception of the atoning sacrifice and the sanctifying spirit. Whatever individual has this faith, experimentally and spiritually—whatever else he has, or whatever else he has not—is one with Christ, as a vital member of his mystical body; whatever individual clearly and credibly professes this faith—whatever else he professes or denies—is a proper subject for admission into any particular church; and whatever church explicitly retains and teaches this faith, without corrupting and destroying it by superadded perversions, is a true Church, and ought to be recognised as a part of the visible Christian community. This faith may consist with every possible form of discipline and order, and therefore no particular form of order and discipline, in connection with which it *does* exist, can be properly considered as subversive of a character derived from something distinct from both, and superior to either." [1]

[1] The Rev. T. Binney, Dr Massie's vol. p. 78.

Lord Herbert.—This clever statement overshoots the mark. It does not secure union, but legalises division. May not *the true Church* be in a state of *schism?* If there be something which, by itself alone, at once makes a man one with Christ and a member of his Church, then schism is not defined or prevented, but annihilated. For if an individual has not this one thing, he is not a Christian, and cannot, therefore, be a schismatic. And so long as he possesses this something, if he be thereby a member of the one true Church, he cannot, of course, be a schismatic in this case either. To assert that the faith on which *the unity* of the Church is based, "may consist with every possible form of discipline and order," is almost equivalent to saying that every Christian may be a church to himself if he chooses.

Theophilus.—It seems needful to reiterate the sentiment, that true Christians may be guilty of schism, and a true Church be enfeebled by division. While the true Church may exist in different places and ages under various outward forms, yet if Christians, living together in the same neighbourhood or *parish*, cannot agree upon the same form of order and discipline, a schism is most undoubtedly developed. When a professed follower of Christ is not a member of the Christian Church which has been formed in his own locality, there is plainly culpability resting upon it or upon him.

This culpability may be twofold in either case. The Church may be either apostate or schismatical; and so may the individual. If the fundamentals of Christianity be denied by either party, and *another* gospel embraced, there is no schism properly so called. If the Church holds

the gospel in its purity and integrity, and the individual rejects it, he is rightfully excluded and regarded as an "unbeliever." And if the Church denies *the truth*, while the individual confesses it, he justly leaves the corrupt society, and becomes the nucleus of a genuine Christian Church, as Luther did when he stood almost alone in the earlier stages of his career. But when both parties are acknowledged to be true Christians, and yet cannot associate in church-fellowship, then is schism manifested; and, as has been often remarked, the guilt thereof must rest upon the Church or the individual, according as the one or the other has given way to unholy dispositions, or espoused the error which rends the society into twain.

The Church has two grand aims to keep in view,—to admit *all* Christ's true *disciples*, if possible, and at the same time testify to *all* the *Truth*. To throw one of these aims into conflict with the other is as common as it is disastrous. To construct the gate of entrance to the Church such, that the weakest and most ignorant Christian shall not be excluded, while by his admission no iota of truth shall be compromised, is the great practical problem to be solved. If, on the one hand, you reduce the testimony of the Church to the smallest possible dimensions, so that every erring brother may easily find admission, then does the Church cease to exercise her function as witness for God,—as the pillar and ground of the Truth. If, on the other hand, the confession of the Church be amplified, and positive approval thereof be demanded from every one as the condition of admission, then a stumbling-block is thrown in the way of many of the most estimable and conscientious. If in constructing the terms of communion

in their details, the question be, not how many points of truth can we include, but how few will suffice, every one will perceive that we are taking a position on most unstable and slippery ground. If, again, in dealing with individual souls, we shall regard none as worthy of the fellowship of the Church, but such as have nearly approached the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus, we shall soon find ourselves entangled in the meshes of spiritual despotism and all uncharitableness. If the Evangelical Alliance had but solved this problem in a practical form, it would have performed a great achievement.

The Alliance by adopting even its limited and modified Confession of Faith has knowingly and deliberately excluded from its pale, some whom it hesitates not to recognise as true Christians. If this principle be sound, as we think it is, the Alliance would be justified in going much further in testifying for truth than it has done. It has stopped at a point, that has been fixed in a most arbitrary manner. Denominations go further, and are justified in going further; but they too often mix error with truth in their testimony. Every error introduced into an ecclesiastical symbol, is, of course, an element of schism. Besides, both our various denominations and the Evangelical Alliance have failed to bring out, broadly and practically, the distinction between suspense of judgment on any topic, and avowed active opposition to some truth.

The real and effective bond of Christian Union is, and can be, nothing else than *the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.* When the Church of God would proclaim her faith to the world, it is equally hazardous, because equally criminal, to exclude one known truth, as

to admit one error. It seems perfectly consistent, on the principles which we advocate, with the most ample testimony for truth, to have a wide and open door for every honest and diligent inquirer, however *ignorant* he may at first be. For the door should be closed only against such as distinctly and doggedly oppose some portion of the Church's articulate confession. It seems to us to be indubitable that every vigorous abettor of any error, or, which is the same thing, every active opponent of any truth, is *ipso facto* a schismatic. There must ever be a painful and perplexing compromise between the claims of truth and charity, unless the Church invariably distinguish between the *ignorant* and the *erring*. The Evangelical Alliance is the victim of this compromise. Some of her members deeply regret that so many true Christians are excluded from her fellowship; while others regret as deeply that so few truths have received her testimony. If the Church will put *nothing but truth* into her confession, she need not be afraid of enlarging it to the very utmost. And if she will welcome all the doubting and anxious and thoughtful to her lucid instructions, meeting them not in dictatorial arrogance, but in tender love, she will infringe no canon of charity, but only prove faithful to her trust, when excluding from her pale every bold impugner of any truth whatever.

If a man can find any one Scripture truth, he *need not err*, though he *may be ignorant*, as to any other Scripture truth. If the Church be bound to hold forth one doctrine of her Master, she is equally bound to hold them *all* forth, as from time to time she learns them. If a Christian severs his connection with his brethren by deny-

ing any one statement of the Bible, why may he not do so by denying any other statement? To attempt to found the Church on other principles than these, is to occupy ground, which very soon in practical details and difficulties begins to shake and feel boggy under our feet.

Melancthon.—Grant at least to the Evangelical Alliance the substantial merits which belong to it.

Theophilus.—We admit that its aim is most magnanimous and Christian, and admire the wisdom of many of the means which have been adopted for its accomplishment. But we must be allowed to point out at the same time what appear to us to be its serious defects and blemishes.

Melancthon.—Allow me to remind you that the Evangelical Alliance is not an alliance of denominations, or branches of the Church, but of individual Christians, each acting on his own responsibility.

Bellarmine.—This notion that advocates *Christian union*, and rejects a *union of churches*, is a favourite one with the members of the Alliance. Any unsophisticated mind, who is uninitiated in Protestant logic, would certainly conclude that the union of Christian men and the union of Christian churches should not be incompatible the one with the other. For what is a Christian church, but a union of Christian men, *as such?* And what does the Evangelical Alliance profess to be but a union of Christian men, *as such?* Why then should the one union be so desirable and advantageous, while the other is regarded as so impracticable and inexpedient?

Melancthon.—"Let us follow this rule: those whom Christs accepts, we will accept. Oh that we may breathe

that Spirit! And, though every man must have a connection with some of the tribes of the great commonwealth of God's Israel, yet let that connection be on the maxim,—'Preference, not exclusion.'"[1]

Lord Herbert.—If Christians formed and maintained their denominational connections on this maxim, there would be no demand for such an institution as the Evangelical Alliance. When one man prefers to be a chemist, and another prefers to be a mathematician, and there is no exclusion or condemnation of the one by the other, there is also no alienation or rivalry between them, requiring to be softened or removed. But such is not the case with denominational Christians. Their respective peculiarities are notoriously exclusive of each other. Does Arminianism not exclude Calvinism? And of the various forms of church government, each *jus divinum* form most certainly *excludes* all the rest. If at *union* meetings the maxim be, "Preference, not exclusion," at *denominational* meetings the maxim is reversed, and becomes "Exclusion, not preference." Such tergiversation would be insufferable in infidels or Papists!

Theophilus.—We need no stronger proof of the corrupt state of our affairs than the fact, that while an alliance of individuals from various churches is practicable, any alliance of these churches themselves seems to be so utterly hopeless. In this critical emergency the Evangelical Alliance steers a middle and unworthy course. She is not satisfied with things as they are, and yet she will not profess reform in a decided and unambiguous tone. She feels that something must be attempted in the

[1] Dr S. H. Cox, Report, &c. p. 477.

way of progress and improvement. But to expect denominations *as they are* to amalgamate, would be to expect "the wolf to dwell with the lamb, and the leopard to lie down with the kid," while the wolf retained his ferocity, and the leopard his savage wildness. In these circumstances the Alliance desires and aims at reform, but in reality (we do not say, intentionally), pursues a sycophantic conservative policy. She professes to meet and remove the evil of schism in the Church, while in fact, so far as the present question is concerned, she succumbs and yields to it. This is a new phase of our social malady, and it is a symptom not a little alarming.

Melancthon.—No other course was open to the originators of the Alliance, unless they had acted on the principle of representation. For this the mind of the community is not nearly ripe.

Lord Herbert.—I always understood it to be a professed principle of Christians, that they should do, not what is expedient, but what is right. And if any man does not know his duty, the best kindness that can be shewn him is to teach him his duty.

Bellarmine.—But the Alliance has not totally rejected the principle of representation.

Melancthon.—If you mean that the appointment of committees and office-bearers proceeds on a representative principle, your remark is undoubtedly correct. For the absolute exclusion of all representation would utterly prevent union and alliance in any form. But you are aware that the different district organizations of the Alliance are in a great measure independent of each other.

Lord Herbert.—What, then, is the relation which they hold to each other?

Melancthon.—The following are the resolutions which were adopted in reference to this matter :—

"I. That whereas brethren from the continents of Europe and America, as well as in this country, are unable, without consultation with their countrymen, to settle all the arrangements for their respective countries, it is expedient to defer the final and complete arrangement of the details of the Evangelical Alliance, of which the foundation has now been laid, till another General Conference.

"II. That the Alliance consist of all such members of this Conference, and members and corresponding members of the divisions of the Provisional Committee, as shall adhere to the principles and objects of the Alliance. Persons may be admitted to membership of the Alliance by consent of all the district organizations, or by a vote of a General Conference, and to membership of any district organization by such mode as each district organization may determine.

"III. That the members of the Alliance be recommended to form district organizations in such manner as shall be most in accordance with the peculiar circumstances of each district: Provided, however, first, that neither the Alliance, nor the respective district organization, shall be held responsible for the proceedings of any district organization; secondly, that no member of any district organization shall, as such, be a member of the Alliance; and, thirdly, that whenever a district organization shall be formed, the members of the Alliance,

within that district, shall act collectively in its formation." [1]

Lord Herbert.—This is a rare and curious constitution. Each district organization has full power to admit its own members, but then membership in a district organization does not constitute membership in the Alliance! The reason of this must of course be, that a General Conference, or the organizations in distant districts, have more means of knowing and judging of a man's character than his own immediate neighbours! The members of this Alliance surely wish themselves to be regarded as the very élite of the world, when the district organization of a whole empire is not intrusted with the prerogative of adding one to their number.

Bellarmine.—This is the modern Protestant version of "primitive discipline and apostolic order!" In those days the member of a church in one place was hailed by all churches as a member of the one catholic Church; and on his removal to a new locality, he needed no more than his credentials of membership from the church he was leaving, to be received as a brother by Christians anywhere and everywhere. Protestant doctors thus profess themselves to be wiser than the founders of the Church. Each district organization is an independent and isolated association; while the Alliance will not hold itself implicated in any of their respective proceedings. There is a semi-connection, which looks somewhat like a sham; for there is a virtual and palpable want of union. What has never been united cannot be said to be severed. The Evangelical Alliance and its organizations, therefore, can

[1] Abstract, &c. p. 8.

scarcely be likened to anything more coherent than a rope of sand. I never saw or heard of a tree, whose stock was independent of its branches, and the branches dissociated from the stock. The very conception of such a tree baffles my imagination.

Melancthon.—Well, the fact is, that such was not the organization originally proposed, which was free from the objections that have now been offered.

Lord Herbert.—Was there any particular circumstance that led to the adoption of such an anomalous constitution?

Melancthon.—The circumstances were these. A discussion arose on the question of slavery, some wishing to exclude, and some being desirous of admitting, slaveholders as members of the Alliance. Many efforts were made,—prayerful, and protracted, and earnest endeavours were put forth to solve this grave question, and get successfully over this formidable difficulty. At last, in answer to fervent supplications, and as the result of the most unwearied assiduity, the Conference at London was led to the adoption of the organization above described, not merely as the only outlet from their perplexity, but also as what appeared to them, a satisfactory deliverance from their dilemma.

Bellarmine.—As I understand the matter, the opposite parties on the question of slavery acted on the principle, which has been the fruitful source of Protestant sectarism,—When they could not agree, they agreed to differ. Now, they ought to have agreed. The question of slavery is a most momentous one. To affirm that both parties sought the truth, as they might have done, and

ought to have done, and yet came to their conflicting conclusions, is to teach undiluted scepticism. The party that held the truth ought not to have been afraid or ashamed to treat the other party as in error. But for both parties in such a question to agree to differ, is to deck treason to truth with the trappings of a sentimental charity.

Lord Herbert.—It thus appears that in the very corner-stone of the Evangelical Alliance itself—the institution which was to heal ecclesiastical schisms, and promote and accomplish Christian concord,—there is found a most palpable and ominous fissure.

Theophilus.—The exact point at which the divergence took place in the discussion on slaveholding was the following,—whether or not the Alliance should affirm this resolution:—"And, in respect especially to the system of slavery, and every other form of oppression in any country, the Alliance are unanimous in deploring them, as in many ways obstructing the progress of the gospel; and express their confidence, that no branch will admit to membership slaveholders, who, by their own fault, continue in that position, retaining their fellow-men in slavery, from regard to their own interests."[1]

Though the preparation of this resolution in the above form was the result of long and anxious deliberation, it did not secure harmony. For, in the first place, the American brethren felt offended that the subject of slavery should be specified at all in the resolutions of the Alliance. And, in the second place, some of them thought that this resolution went too far, while not a

[1] Report, &c. p. 371.

few of the British members thought that it did not go far enough.

The reconciliation of these conflicting views being found impracticable, a compromise was effected by the plan of organization which was at last adopted, as given above.

If we were now asked to state, in illustration of the principles which we have been asserting, in what way this compromise could have been avoided, and harmony in opinion and action secured, we should reply thus:—Firstly, the friends from America had some ground of complaint in regard to the introduction of the topic. But Christian magnanimity might have led them to overlook the offence. If their besetting sin were brought forward for discussion by the British brethren, the most Christian course would have been for them to have met it in a proper spirit and disposed of it in a scriptural manner; and then they might have called attention to some besetting sin of those on this side the Atlantic, and thus the whole Christian community been improved and benefitted. We do not, therefore, sympathise with the American friends in the extreme sensitiveness with which they shrunk from the very mention of slavery.

Secondly, the first difficulty just specified would have soon been removed, but for the substantial difference of opinion that lay beyond it. The proposal already quoted was too stringent for some members of the Alliance, and was too lax for others. It appears to us to express in a very admirable manner the precise ground on which they ought to have united and coalesced. It follows, if this view be adopted, that the Evangelical Alliance, with its

district organizations mutually independent and irresponsible towards each other, is only a fresh manifestation of our inveterate schisms, and is a society, regarded in this aspect, as destitute of reasonable, as it is of scriptural and traditional support.

We assume as a fundamental principle, that the responsibility of one Christian assembly to another Christian assembly, is substantially the same as the responsibility of one Christian individual to another Christian individual. A member of any particular church is responsible for the conduct of his brother-members, to this extent, that if any of them act inconsistently with their Christian profession, he is bound to see, directly or indirectly, by his own efforts or by means of the elders (or deacons) who are his representatives, that the inconsistency shall be made a matter of church discipline, and be righteously dealt with. In like manner, if the union of churches is to be a fact—if Christian concord on a broad and firm basis is not to be for ever lost in empty talk and sentimental meetings—then one Christian congregation must be held responsible for other Christian congregations in a well-defined and important sense. The moment that one church, amongst a number of affiliated churches, does any thing as a church, to damage Christianity by coming short of its own Christian reputation and character, all the associated Churches are bound in vindication of themselves and their cause to take action in regard to the offending society. So long as the associated Churches do nothing that mars or disturbs their professed union, they must be regarded as virtually and in fact homologating each other's proceedings; and, more especially, membership in any one must be held to

be equivalent to membership in any other, unless their alleged union be no more than a shallow pretence.

It does not, then, appear to be so very difficult to say, what means should be adopted to heal the manifold and mischievous divisions of the Christian Church. Let the disciples living in one parish form a congregation—let the representatives of a convenient number of such congregations form a society, to meet monthly for the management of its affairs. While the representatives of a larger number of congregations should form an association to meet yearly or half-yearly. The limits of time and place are obviously the conditions on which such associations should be constructed. Any other representative assembly would be uncalled for in ordinary circumstances. If any emergency arose demanding ought approximating to an œcumenical council, such council ought to be held only *when* such an emergency was pressing, and ought to sit only for the transaction of its special business.

We do not regret, therefore, that the *œcumenical organization* of the Alliance has proved a failure. It ought never to have been attempted. Christian union should not be identified with a universal confederation, and its necessary concomitant of centralised power.

The theory now propounded is, as a theory, simple, scriptural, and reasonable. If it be assailed as Utopian and impracticable, it is so just because the Christian graces of integrity and meekness may also be characterised as Utopian and impracticable. Whatever difficulties attach to this scheme are difficulties of our own making, Honesty in forming our opinions, and forbearance in our conduct, are no more than what is expected from us all, as men.

not to say as Christians. These virtues would untie the gordian knot, which is now a scandal to the intelligence of the Protestant Churches; while they would, more obviously and not less surely, medicate and heal the alienations which are the canker-worm of our Christian charity.

CONCLUSION.

I.—*Historical.*

Before finally closing the argument, it is desirable to glance at the historical aspects of the question. The conclusions to which we have been led are these :—

1. While men may be ignorant of many things, or form doubtful hypotheses to aid their investigations, or be entangled in practical fallacies which they have not had adequate opportunity to examine, yet when they use their reason conscientiously, in the only valid and genuine sense of the term, on any special point, they will not form on that point a deliberate and erroneous judgment.

2. Hence the only reasonable and scriptural basis for Christian union is agreement in interpreting the Word of God on every point of faith and duty. When the interpretations are not positively harmonious, they must at least be negatively such, or non-conflicting.

3. The outward bond of Christian brotherhood,—the visible badge of discipleship, being simultaneous communion in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, two or more communion tables cannot be legitimately erected, except to suit the convenience of the brethren, on account of their distant residences or growing numbers.

These topics have come up before the minds of the Christian community of the present age, in a shape and attitude and combination of circumstances, which are quite unparalleled in the history of the Church. Hence, when we look into the opinions of those who have gone before us, we may not readily find distinct or frequent expressions of sentiment, bearing directly upon the question, in the precise form in which it has now been put. If, to supplement this deficiency, we begin to compare the current views of this generation with those of preceding periods, inferentially and by way of good and necessary consequence, then a very wide field of discussion is opened up. We need not be surprised if we find in such an inquiry, what has been often found, that both the conflicting parties have substantial reasons for referring to the writings of the very same celebrated and honoured men in support of their respective tenets. It has even happened that opposite views have been sustained by quotations from different pages of the very same volume. The Papists and the Protestants have appealed against each other to the post-apostolic fathers in vindication of their hostile systems; and in not a few instances the appeal and the counter-appeal, in the very same issue, are about equally valid. The explanation of this strange phenomenon lies in the fact, that the primitive Church, while holding fast the great truths of the gospel, was at a very early period deeply tinged with the subtler errors of Romanism.

So far as our observation has extended, more can be alleged in defence of the views propounded in these pages than against them, out of the records of the past; and therefore the opinions opposed, rather than those advo-

cated here, seem to wear an aspect of novelty in the history of Christianity. In the volumes to which frequent reference has been made, there are not only the distinctive opinions which have been commented upon, but there is also the absence of any clear and firm enunciation of the principle on which alone Christian union can rest, not to speak of its vigorous defence or pointed application. That there is much that is excellent in these writers, as well as in the Evangelical Alliance, and that they have done much good, we rejoice in believing. We feel assured that their advocacy of brotherly love, and their efforts for its promotion, have been richly and largely owned and blessed of God, and have prepared the way for something better still.

That the principle of Christian co-operation, as now set forth, is not altogether an unrecognised or unsupported dogma in ecclesiastical literature, let the following quotations, as specimens gathered in a historical excursion, bear testimony :—

The reader will recollect, that the Evangelical Alliance deliberately refused to sanction conferences among its members, with the view of promoting concord in interpreting the word of God. John Knox, in a short piece, entitled "A Most Wholesome Counsel Touching God's Holy Word," remarks :—

"I think it necessary, that for the conference of Scriptures, assemblies of brethren be had. . . . By hearing, reading, and comparing the Scriptures, in the assembly, the whole body of the Scriptures of God shall become familiar; the judgments and spirits of men shall be tried, their patience and modesty shall be known, and finally their gifts and utterance shall appear. Multiplication of words, perplexed interpretation, and wilfulness in reasoning, is to

be avoided at all times, and in all places, but chiefly in the congregation, where nothing ought to be respected, except the glory of God, and comfort and edification of our brethren. If anything occur within the text, or yet arise in reasoning, which your judgments cannot resolve, or capacities apprehend, let the same be noted and put in writing, before ye depart the congregation, that when God shall offer unto you any interpreter, your doubts being noted and known, may have the more expeded resolution. . . . For it shall greatly comfort you, to hear that harmony and well-tuned song of the Holy Spirit speaking in our fathers from the beginning. It shall confirm you in these dangerous and perilous days, to behold the face of Christ Jesus' loving Spouse and Kirk, from Abel to himself, and from himself to this day, in all ages to be one."

Nothing was evidently further from the thoughts of John Knox, than the idea of Christian brethren remaining contented, each with his own opinion, when it is so evident that each opinion cannot be in Scripture. Verily our modern "*perplexed interpretations*," albeit they be set forth under the seal of conscience, have been making sad havoc with "*the harmony and well-tuned song of the Holy Spirit*."

Let us now look into Calvin's Institutes. The perspicuity of Scripture is stated with great precision and force, as well as our obligation to adhere to the Divine oracle in every particular. If these two truths be intelligently embraced and consistently adhered to, the idea of two parties occupying hostile positions, and pleading the authority of the Bible each in his own defence, and at the same time respecting each other's conscientiousness and uprightness in so doing, is surely inadmissible.

"It is a most vain fancy, that the power of judging Scripture lies with the Church; so that the certainty of the former should be

supposed to depend upon the consent of the latter. Though the Church receives the Bible, and seals it with her approbation, this does not make it authentic against doubts and controversies; she only devoutly and without dubiety renders it homage, acknowledging it to be the truth of God Himself. But it is asked, whence are we persuaded that it comes from God, unless we betake ourselves to the Church's decision? This is the same as asking, How do we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? For Scripture carries with it a conviction of its truth not less distinct than do white and black objects of their colour; sweet and bitter, of their taste."—(Lib. I. vii. 2.) "The Lord hath joined the certainty of His Word and Spirit by a mutual bond; so that the sound religion of the Word sinks into our hearts, when the Spirit shines and enables us to see the face of God there: so that we then embrace the Spirit without any fear of deception, when we recognise Him in His own image, that is, in the Word."—(Lib. I. ix. 3.) Then again, when expounding Christian liberty, he declares.—"Let the readers be sure of this, that notwithstanding all the stumbling-blocks by which Satan and the world may endeavour to turn us from the precepts of God, or to hinder us from prosecuting what He enjoins, it must nevertheless be diligently performed: and whatever dangers may threaten, we are not at liberty to depart a hair's-breadth from the command of God, nor is it lawful to attempt anything which He has not sanctioned."—(Lib. III. xix. 13.) "Since in those ordinances which seem to belong to the spiritual (as opposed to the political or civil kingdom), there may arise some mistake, it is proper to distinguish among these also, which may lawfully be observed as in harmony with the word of God; and which ought not to be allowed among the godly."—(Ib. 15.)

Calvin is not satisfied with the mere general statement of these principles; he carries them out consistently to their consequences, and applies them to special cases and individual parties. He enters into many details to show that the same law was binding on patriarchs, prophets,

apostles, evangelists, and modern ministers. That law he thus enunciates:—

"The power of the Church, therefore, is not unlimited, but it is in subordination to the word of the Lord, and is as it were contained in it."—(Lib. IV. viii. 4.) "Let this then be an established principle, that nothing is to be regarded as the word of God, to which respect is to be rendered in the Church, but what is contained either in the law and the prophets, or in the apostolic writings; nor is there any other proper manner of instruction in the Church, except by the command and rule of that Word. Hence also, we infer that the Apostles had no promise, which the Prophets had not formerly received; namely, that they should expound the Old Testament, and show that all things therein delivered are fulfilled in Christ. This work, however, they could not fulfil except by the Lord's help,—that is, by the Spirit of Christ leading them, and in a manner suggesting words. For by this rule Christ limited their mission (Matt. xxviii. 20), when he directed them to go and teach, not whatever things they might rashly invent, but whatsoever He had commanded them."—(Ib. 8.) "Thus Peter, instructed most wisely by the Master, shows that nothing is left to himself or others, however great his own privileges might be, but to minister the doctrine delivered by God. 'If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God' (1 Pet. iv. 11.); *that is, not doubtfully, as they who are conscious of evil are wont to tremble, but with exalted confidence, which is becoming the servant of God intrusted with an indisputable charge.*"—(Ib. 9.) "Therefore if faith relies on the Word of God alone, and regards and rests upon it only, what room now is left for the word of the whole world? Nor can any one hesitate here who really knows what faith is; for it must be upheld with such power, as to enable it to remain unconquered and unalarmed against Satan, and all the enginery of devils, and the whole world. We shall not find this power anywhere but in the Word of God. Accordingly the law, to which we refer, is universal; God has taken away from men the liberty of introducing a new dogma, that He alone may be our Master in spiritual doctrine: as He alone is true, and cannot

lie or be deceived. This law applies not less to the whole Church than to every one of the faithful."—(Ib. 9.)

If language has any meaning, it follows most obviously from these statements, that for any individual or any sect, to put forth as Scripture what in fact is not scriptural, is a grievous offence. And it is just as obvious that this heinous transgression is committed by at least one of the parties, whenever there is a visible separation among the professed followers of Christ. But let us listen to Calvin again:—

"The Lord is constantly present with His people, and governs them by His Spirit. His Spirit is not one of error, ignorance, lying, or darkness; but of sure revelation, wisdom, truth, and light, by whom they unerringly learn to know what things are freely given to them (1 Cor. ii. 12)—that is, what is the hope of their calling, and what the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints.—(Eph. i. 18.) And as to those believers who feel in the flesh the beginnings, and at least some taste, of that Spirit, as well as those who receive gifts more excellent than others; their chief concern should be, conscious of their own weakness, carefully to restrict themselves within the boundaries of God's Word, lest, wandering too far under their own guidance, they straightway depart from the right road, when they are without that Spirit, by whose teaching alone the true and the false are distinguished. For all confess with Paul (Phil. iii. 12), that they have not yet reached the goal. Therefore they are striving for daily progress, rather than glorying in perfection."—(Lib. IV. viii. 11.) "You must hear the Church, the Romanists say. Who denies it? when she affirms nothing but from the Lord's Word. If they demand anything more, let them know these words of Christ are of no avail for anything else. I wish not to appear too disputatious, yet I must urgently insist upon this, that the Church cannot allow any new doctrine,—that is, teach anything, and hold it as a divine oracle, which the Lord has not revealed in His Word. For sober men will perceive how much

danger will arise, if such a right be once allowed to men. They will also see what a large inlet will be opened for the mockery and taunts of the ungodly, if we concede that a human opinion is to be regarded by Christians as an oracle of heaven."—(Ib. 15.)

In the last part of this quotation, the great Reformer seems, by a prophetic touch, to describe the state of matters in the present day. We may now refer to the opinion held by Calvin and many others, that nothing can justify separation from a particular church, but its full and open apostasy. This opinion is certainly more in favour of our sentiments than of those we are opposing. But it is based upon the popish dogma, in which the Protestant Church seems to be still entangled to a great extent, that the terms of ecclesiastical communion and those of eternal salvation are identical. After quoting from Cyprian to justify his own opinion, Calvin states the matter thus:—

"Let both of these points be regarded as settled, that there is no excuse for him who wilfully forsakes the external communion of the church, in which the Word of God is preached, and the sacraments administered: and secondly, that the faults, whether of many or few, are no obstruction to the right profession of our faith there in divinely instituted ordinances: because the godly conscience is not violated by the unworthiness either of the pastor or a private member, nor are the mysteries (ordinances) less pure or wholesome to the holy and upright man, because they are at the same time handled by the impure."—(Lib. IV. i. 19.)

Now it seems to us plain, that the conscience may be violated often and grievously before the church becomes as corrupt as the Church of Rome. No Christian ought to remain in any communion, where his conscience is offended. But if he leave an existing communion, plead-

ing conscience unwarrantably and erroneously, he is a schismatic. The following sentence, especially when taken in connection with all the preceding extracts, appears to us to be of some weight.

"We must adhere to the sentiment which we have quoted from Paul (2 Cor. iv. 5, 6), that the Church cannot be edified, but by external preaching, *nor can believers be kept together by any bond, except while with one accord, by learning and advancing to perfection, they observe the order of the church ordained by God.*"—(Lib. IV. i. 5.)

In vindication of the manner in which the question was stated by us at the outset, and of the method in which the whole discussion has been conducted, we close our extracts from Calvin by the following:—

"Augustine takes this distinction between heretics and schismatics; the former corrupt the purity of the faith by false dogmas; the latter sometimes also retaining the similarity of the faith break the bond of society. This, however, is to be noticed, that this union of love is so connected with the unity of the faith, that the latter ought to be the beginning, end, and indeed the only rule of the former. Let us therefore remember that as often as ecclesiastical union is enjoined upon us, this ought to be our aim, that having our understandings at one in Christ, our affections also be joined together in a mutual endearment in Christ. Wherefore Paul, when exhorting us to the latter, lays this foundation, that there is one God, one faith, and one baptism (Eph. 4. 5) Yea, whenever he instructs us to think alike, and desire alike, he always adds, in Christ, or after Christ (Phil. ii. 2 and 5); meaning that it is a faction of the ungodly, not an association of believers, which is organised independently of the Word of the Lord"—(quæ fit extra verbum Domini.)—Lib. IV. ii. 5. This language plainly implies, that any society is a church of Christ only so far as it is constituted according to his Word.

As to John Howe, the greatest of the Puritan Divines,

though he was entangled in the error that confounds the terms of church-fellowship with the terms of final acceptance before God, we can appeal to him in support of the main positions of our argument.

"But you will say, What is to be done? or what would I persuade in this case of differing apprehensions and ways still remaining among Christians? In answer, Not presently to unbelieve all that ever a man hath believed before; or to abandon on the sudden his former sentiments, or to find fault with himself for having thought them right. For 'tis a contradiction to be of any opinion, and not then to think it right. Nor, therefore, is it scepticism, by any means, that I would advise to; as if there were nothing to be thought certain, but this; that whereas the greatest and most necessary things in religion are most plain, that is, either most plain in themselves, or most expressly revealed in the Word of God. Here let us be stedfast ourselves, without being severe towards other men. Other things, that are more matter of doubt and dispute, by how much the less plain they are, we should count so much the less necessary. In reference therefore to these less momentous things, about which there is with us most of jangling, there ought always to be great modesty, and distrust of our own understandings, *and a continued readiness to receive information, with constant looking up to the Father of lights for further illumination*, and a resolution, wherein we, with others, have attained, to walk by the same rule," &c.—Sermon II. on Gal. v. 16.

In the same sermon, after blaming certain modes of discussion and angry disputes, he observes,—"Though yet the endeavour of solving difficulties that occur, by earnest prayer, diligent study, and by amicable and placid collation among brethren, or comparing of sentiments, sincerely designed for a clearer understanding the frame of the Gospel truth, or how it may be with most advantage represented to men for the promoting of the common salvation, can be liable to no just reprehension, being managed with that reverence that so sacred things challenge, and with a due sense of our own ignorance and imperfection."

Some might be disposed to quote Howe against us, when he says, that "truly Christian love would do all that it can, supplying the rest by grief that it can do no more;" and among other things that "it would certainly make us abstain from mutual censures of one another as insincere for our remaining differences."

"If truly Christian love, or even justice itself, did take place as they ought; it would be considered what these several differing parties have to say for themselves, what reasons they may allege, and whether though they be not sufficient to justify their several opinions and practices, (as all cannot be in the right), they be not such as by which a conscientious man, a sincere fearer of God, may be swayed, so as to take the way which he is found in by the ducture of an upright (though misguided) conscience, and not as being under the government of depraved vicious inclination."—Sermon on Col. ii. 2.

All that seems to be meant by these statements is, that a man, though wrong in one or more of his judgments, may yet be an honest and upright individual in his general character. Howe would have shrunk from the bold and open avowal of the sentiment, that a man's conscience, may be misguided in its decision of any question, after it has been upright in all its dealings with that very question. He elsewhere says:—

"Conscience doth import a power of judging, or an ability to judge about such and such matters." "The matter of which conscience is to judge is of this kind; to wit, what we are to do, or our actions as they are future, or to be done, must be taken with a latitude; so as not barely or chiefly to concern our external actions, the actions of the outward man; no, nor merely or only to concern those actions of the inward man, that proceed immediately from the will and from the affections, and from the executive power in the first rise of it; but also so as to comprehend and take in too, the actions of the

mind and understanding; all this is within the compass of this matter, about which conscience is to be exercised."—Sermon I. 2 Cor. iv. 2.

"If conscience were not a capable principle of judgment, when it is applied unto, when appeals are made to it, it would be the vainest thing in all the world to talk of commending ourselves to the consciences of men, in the sight of God, as the Apostle here speaks. Why to their consciences? It were as good do it to anything else as conscience,—if conscience be not a principle susceptible of conviction, when it is applied unto. Therefore now let it be considered, that *conscience is a judge wherever it hath place and is applied unto;* it *doth (as it were) keep its power;* and, indeed, it is capable of sustaining several parts: where there is a judicature, there is a registry too; and it is as well capable of recording things as of judging them." —Sermon IV. 2 Cor. iv. 2.

If any one will again bring forward this author's expression "an upright (though misguided) conscience," without undertaking to vindicate altogether his consistency, we should answer in his own words:—

"The great business of the Gospel ministry doth very principally lie in a transaction with men's conscience. And this transaction doth lie (among other things) in endeavouring to awaken conscience, supposing it drowsy and somnolent, as, God knows, it is too much with the most; when we have appealed to conscience, to appeal again, as that petitioner did to that great prince: 'I appeal from thee,' said she. 'From me!' said the prince, 'Whither wilt thou appeal?' 'I appeal,' said she, 'from you asleep; you were asleep just now, while I was telling my story: I appeal from you asleep, to you awake.' So we are to appeal from conscience to conscience; from conscience asleep to conscience awake."—(Ib.)

We have no other appeal on earth; we *can* have no other; we *need* no other.

Let us now consult the works of one of Howe's contemporaries, Turrettine, who flourished in another land.

Turrettine says: "When a dispute arises respecting the true interpretation of any passage of Scripture, it is not necessary that there be some visible infallible Judge beside Scripture; *for Scripture interprets itself;* and although man brings out such interpretation, it must not be supposed that he is the author of it; because he mixes with it nothing of his own, adds nothing to Scripture, but only draws and takes out of Scripture what was lying hid in it, as he who legitimately deduces a conclusion from premises, does not arbitrarily invent it, but draws it from the admitted premises and as lying hid in them."—Loc. II. Qu. xx. xxii.

The inference from this statement is as plain as possible, that to put a wrong interpretation upon Scripture, then plead conscience in its defence, and then rend the Church in support of it, is most unwarrantable and criminal.

Again he writes: "The Bereans did not first inquire, whether Paul who was addressing them were moved by the Holy Ghost, because this was manifest to God only, who knoweth the heart, but whether Paul spoke according to the Scriptures; and they inferred from his conformity with Scripture, that he spoke not of himself, but by the Holy Ghost. We conclude in the golden words of Basil: 'Let the divinely inspired Scripture, therefore, judge for us, and with whom shall be found doctrines agreeable to Scripture, with them surely let there be the decrees of truth.'"—Ib. xxxv.

The above seems to us to be explicit enough, and should put to shame our modern maxim, that his own interpretation of the Bible is to every man the right one; but the following quotation will put the matter beyond all dispute:—

"It is one thing to talk of the ignorance and blindness of man; and another thing of the obscurity of Scripture. The former is often dwelt upon in Scripture. But the latter is different, nor does

the one follow legitimately from the other, any more than that the sun is obscure, because it is not seen by a blind man. Hence when David and other believers pray that their eyes may be opened to see the wonderful things of God's law, the obscurity of Scripture cannot on that account be asserted, but only the ignorance of man. And here we are not inquiring whether men need the light of the Holy Spirit to understand Scripture, which we willingly allow; *but whether the Scriptures be obscure to a believing and enlightened man.* We distinguish also between theoretical and practical enlightenment; as well as between its first degree, and its future increase. David seeks not the former, but the latter. When Christ is said to have opened the understanding of the disciples to understand the Scriptures (Luke xxiv. 45.) this indeed is implied, that man cannot of himself without the aid of grace perceive the meaning of the Scriptures; but no one can forthwith deduce from this the obscurity of Scripture, nor refer to Scripture the darkness which was in the minds of the disciples."—Loc. II. Qu. xvii. xiii. xiv.

Some one may now say, all this is very true, if applied to those fundamental truths of the gospel, which are necessary to salvation. Turrettine and the Reformed Churches had a different notion of the things necessary to salvation from what is now held by many:—

"Whatever causes are alleged by our adversaries for the obscurity of Scripture, they cannot prove that it is so obscure in things necessary to salvation, *as to set it aside as a complete rule of faith and manners*, and that it is necessary in order to surmount them to fly to some infallible ecclesiastical authority and its pretended tribunal. For we are never referred to any thing of this sort, and besides these (causes) are not such that they cannot be surmounted by due attention, and the statements of Scripture referred to are either not necessary to salvation, or if in one or two places they be somewhat obscure, they are elsewhere more clearly unfolded."—Ib. xxi.

The Confession of Bohemia, speaking of accessories, or

things indifferent, says, "they must always be kept with this caution, and within these bounds, that they be not taken for foundations whereupon salvation must stay itself, or *for a worship which is appointed of God without any difference,*" (aut pro cultu, qui a Deo sine ullo discrimine constitutus sit).—Chapter 15. Turrettine complains that the more rigid Lutherans turned things indifferent into things necessary, in order to prove that their opponents disagreed in fundamentals.—Loc. I. Qu xiv. ii. In the next page, he remarks, "that all the truths which are revealed in Scripture are necessary to be believed as divine and infallible, though all are not equally necessary." It was certainly far from the thoughts of any of the Protestant Fathers, to allow that anything revealed in the Bible is indifferent;—or that Christian concord and conscientiousness are compatible with conflicting interpretations of the Word of God on any topic whatever. For example, Turrettine, having reiterated the sentiment, "that Scripture sufficiently interprets itself, and requires no interpreter beyond itself, who shall establish its meaning," goes on to say:—

"Reason illuminated by the Holy Spirit through the Word, is able to consider and determine out of the Word itself according to rules of good and necessary consequence, how the parts of a doctrine cohere among themselves, and what follows from them, and what does not follow. The grounds of this are these: 1. Because Scripture more than once enjoins this judgment.—Matt. vii. 5, et xvi. 6; Col. ii. 8; 1 Thess. v. 21; Heb. v. 14. 2. It is confirmed by good examples.—Acts xvii. 11; 1 Cor. x. 15. 3. It is consonant to the end or aim of the Bible, which is the perfection of the man of God in knowledge of the truth, and in the conviction of gainsayers—1 Tim. iii. 16; Tit. i. 9—which without this cannot be attained.. 4. It is proved by the exercise of reason, whose function

consists in affirming or denying propositions, and in the use of contradiction, to which the decision of reason has regard; and unless this be allowed and settled, the widest door will be opened to heresies and fanatics of every kind, to thrust forth their fancies and monstrous opinions, nor could there ever be any true contradiction, (that is, every thing would be unsettled, and scepticism universal) . . Reason can not only judge of a direct and formal contradiction. which appears in the same terminology and in express affirmation and negation, but also of that which is indirect and implied, and is deduced by necessary consequence: Such as, Christ's blood cleanses us from all sin, therefore there is no purgatory; Christ (his body) ascended up to heaven, therefore he (as man) is not in every place. . . . Although many things may appear contradictory to diverse persons, which are not so in themselves; *it does not follow that any thing will appear to be what it is not to men who use their understanding properly and think legitimately.* . . . We distinguish between reason sound and renewed, in the abstract; and the same in the concrete, as it is found in one and another depraved person: Not in the latter sense, but only in the former, do we assign to reason the power of decision."—Loc. I. Qu. x. iii. iv. ix. xi. xii.

"The abuse of reasoning is not to be confounded with the use of it, . . . else the use of Scripture itself would be condemned, because many heresies abuse it. . . . As Scripture is explained by Scripture, it is enough that Scripture supply grounds and reasons to the interpreter in the context, parallel passages and general scope, &c., by which he may fetch out the true sense of Scripture, and manifest it to others even to their conscience— . . . When we affirm that our inferences (from Scripture) are evident, we do not mean in this sense, that they will be denied by no one, and that they will be readily accepted without any consideration and study; but we mean that they are evident to those who render vigilant attention and due consideration, *or that they are such, that if any one does not see them, he cannot have a good conscience.*"—Loc. I. Qu. xii. xxiv. xxxi. xxxiv.

"Scripture has a *theological* and infallible certainty, which cannot mislead the believing man who is enlightened by the Spirit of God."—Loc. II. Qu. iv. xxii.

We cannot deny ourselves the pleasure of transcribing the following remarks, from the address given by an eminent divine[1] at the Bicentenary of the Westminster Assembly; nor refrain from expressing our regret, that he did not devote his Essay on Christian Union to a vindication and development of the sentiments which he so ably set forth on that occasion. His subject was—"The importance of adhering to sound Scriptural Standards, and aiming at Union on that basis."

"If the Church were a mere voluntary association, or mere society of individuals, associated spontaneously for certain purposes on certain terms, then the Church might be entitled to take up peremptory ground and say, 'You will not consent to our terms, and therefore we will not admit you into our society.' But if the Church be a divine institute, appointed and ordained by God, then she is bound to act on the principle that all have a right of admission to the Church, unless she can shew cause to the contrary from the Word of God. Hence, beyond all doubt, if an allegation be made by any individual to any Church, that certain points in their articles and standards are contrary to the Word of God, she is bound to listen to the allegation, she is bound to look into the matter, and she is also bound, if she is satisfied that the articles are erroneous, to make the required change. . . . . The Church is bound always to act as if she were the sole Church of all Christendom."

"Amidst all the varieties of mind and opinion of the Westminster Assembly, there was an entire unanimity as to the system of doctrine; thus affording the strongest of all proofs that it is quite possible for Christian men, by prayer and consultation together, to come to an agreement, not only on the broad general principles, but even on the details of the Christian system, so that they may be of one mind and heart, not only on certain general propositions, but on the whole tenor of their confessions before God and man."

"As I have said, the Assembly also attempted to promote union

[1] The Rev. R. Candlish, D.D.

by full and deliberate conversations; and in this they were thwarted by influence from without. No one can read the proceedings of that Assembly without seeing that the blessing of God was evidently resting on the attempt of men of different minds to come to a mutual understanding. No man who is familiar with these proceedings but must have been struck with the closer approximation which parties differing on religious grounds seemed to be making, as the discussion went on daily, towards a complete agreement. How nearly, for instance, did the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, widely as they differed afterwards,—how nearly did they come to a practical understanding, and to the adoption of common measures!"

In connection with the history of the Westminster Assembly, the following statements are worthy of being pondered. They are found in a sermon that was preached by Alexander Henderson, minister at Edinburgh, before the House of Commons, 17th December 1643, from Ezra vii. 23—"Whatsoever is commanded by the God of Heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of Heaven; for why should there be wrath against the Realm of the King and his Sons?"

"They are Precisians, indeed, who are liberal in the matters of God, and can find in their hearts to dispense with his commands, his truth and worship; but will not be content to want the least complement of their own worldly honour and dignity, nor the smallest penny of their gain and worldly commodity. Although it be true, that some things in religion be fundamental and absolutely necessary unto salvation, and other things not so, yet to be obstinate against revealed truth, or to misregard or despise smallest matters of religion, which are necessary to be received, if not for themselves, yet for the authority of Scripture (as some make the distinction), bringeth as certain a curse and condemnation, as ignorance and error doth in matters more substantial. . . . . Shall not the domestics of the house of God observe the commandments of God, or shall they

not be grieved when they transgress, and observe them not? . . . . It is a damnable and cursed policy, by dispensing with any thing which God hath commanded to be done for his house, to seek after peace and deliverance. *It was the policy of* Jeroboam, *and it turned to his ruin. It was the policy of the* Jews, *and it brought their city and nation to desolation.* In this thou walkest contrary to God, and therefore God will walk contrary to thee. Thou thinkest to turn away wrath by the neglect of religion, and of the House of God; but God hath said, that wrath shall be upon the kingdom, unless what he hath commanded be done for his House. *Art thou wiser than he? or art thou stronger than he? Wilt thou against the will of God, against the experience of all ages, against thy own conscience, run in a way contrary to God's way? Salvation shall come to the people of God, and his house shall be built; but thou and thy house which thou makest an idol, and deferrest to the House of* God, *shall certainly perish;* God will not be mocked."

There is thus a marked contrast between the spiritual tone of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that of the nineteenth, in speaking of the meaning of the Word of God. The bare possibility of conscientious and conflicting interpretations of that Word on any point whatever, never seems to have flashed across the minds of those giant worthies. In those days men were accustomed to speak of *all* that was in the Bible, and was obligatory upon us, as being, *to the honest mind*, immutable as the everlasting mountains, clear as the sunshine of noon, and incorruptible as the atmosphere of heaven. In their vocabulary, they had only one method of interpretation, the conscientious and the true one. In these days, it would appear, that every man has a right to have his own interpretation, whatever it may be. There are *commands*, it would seem, in the statute-book of Heaven, and in the code of the Christian commonwealth, which are as shifting as the

sands, or as murky as a winter cloud, or as convertible in their substance and principles as commercial paper is transferable from hand to hand. These remarks will be confirmed by the following quotations from the earlier Confessions of the Reformed Churches, to which attention is solicited, before noticing the deliverance of the Westminster Assembly itself, on the matter in hand. The Confession of Sueveland, in treating of Human Traditions, declares :—

"But oftentimes there is disputing about this : What tradition is profitable, what not; that is, what doth set forward godliness, what doth hinder it. But he that shall seek nothing of his own, but shall wholly dedicate himself to the public profit, he shall easily see what things are agreeable to the law of God, what not."—Chapter 14.

The same Confession, in vindicating the proceedings of the Protestant ministers, observes,—

"No ecclesiastical person may justly complain of us, or object to us, that we are not sufficiently obedient to them, or that we do derogate any thing from their authority; seeing that *the thing itself doth witness, that we have attempted and done all those things according to the will of God*, which we have undertaken against the will of Ecclesiastical persons."—Chapter 13.

In the Confession of Augsburg, we find these statements,—

"God will have his Church governed by his Word, which Christ and his Apostles have left unto the Church; and he will have this his voice to sound in the Church by the mouths of his ministers. And though it do contain a wisdom that is far from reason's reach, yet the word of the Prophets and Apostles is sure, and not doubtful. Therefore Peter saith, 'Ye do well in attending to the word of the Prophets, as to a light in the darkness'—2 Pet. i. 19. Besides, the

Church hath the gift of interpretation,—that is, the understanding of the heavenly doctrine; but that is not tied to the name or degree of Bishops; and therefore there is no power of interpreting, like to the power of a Prince, or highest judge. But those that are learned in the Word of God, and born again by his Spirit, in what place soever they be, they assent unto the Word of God, and understand the same, some more some less."—Art. 14.

Let us suppose another clause added to bring up this old document to the measure of the enlightenment of this age, and consider how the old and the new would cohere together.

Moreover, on account of the remaining corruption of the human heart, it will be inevitable that those that are learned in the Word of God, and born again by his Spirit, will sometimes understand it in contradictory senses; and they will also be conscientious and unblamable in so doing.

The Confession of Wirtemburg thus testifies:—

"Now that which is affirmed, that the Church hath authority to bear witness of the holy Scripture, to interpret the Scripture, and to judge of all doctrines; it is not so to be understood, that the Church hath absolute authority to determine what she listeth, and also, if it please her, to change the Scripture, and to feign a new doctrine, and to appoint new worships of God; but that the Church, as the spouse of Christ, ought to know the voice of her husband, and that she hath received of her husband a certain rule, to wit, the Prophetical and Apostolical preaching, confirmed by miracles from heaven, according to the which she is bound to interpret those places of the Scripture which seem to be obscure, and to judge of doctrines." After quoting Fathers and texts in support of these views, the article concludes,—"Wherefore the Church hath so far authority to judge of doctrine, that, notwithstanding, she must keep herself within the bounds of the holy Scripture, which is the voice of her husband, from which voice it is not lawful for any man, no not for angel, to depart."—Art. 32.

All this solemn statement is obvious trifling, if men have not the means of knowing, and knowing with certainty, when they use aright these means, what Scripture really teaches. We find no trace in the Confessions of the Reformed Churches of the distinction between essentials and non-essentials as among the contents of the Bible; on the contrary, it seems to be decidedly set aside, for they held, that every thing revealed or enjoined by God is supremely obligatory upon every church and every individual. For example, the Confession of Bohemia states the matter thus:—

"Because it is a true and sure testimony, and a clear proof of God's favourable good-will, which he hath revealed concerning himself; without which revelation of Scripture, there is no wholesome knowledge, nor faith, nor access to God.—Heb. xi. 1, &c. For in this, such things as are necessary to doctrine, to discipline, and government of the holy Church, for all and singular persons in the ordinary ministry of salvation, (whence also springeth true faith), in this, I say, are all such things fully, absolutely, and so far forth as is requisite, as in a most excellent and most exquisite work of the Holy Ghost, comprehended and included; than which no angel from heaven can bring any thing more certain; and if he should bring any other thing, he ought not to be believed."—Chapter I.

We might go on, quoting to the same effect from other Confessions, but must forbear; we can make room only for one more from the Confession of Scotland, and for a portion of the XX. Article of the Church of England:—

"When controversy, then, happeneth for the right understanding of any place or sentence of Scripture, *or for the reformation of any abuse within the Church of God*, we ought not so much to look what men before us have said or done, as unto that which the Holy Ghost uniformly speaketh within the body of the Scriptures, and

unto that which Christ Jesus himself did, and commanded to be done. For this is one thing universally granted, that the Spirit of God, which is the spirit of unity, is in nothing contrary to himself. —1 Cor. xii. 4-6. If, then, the interpretation, determination, or sentence of any Doctor, Church, or Council, repugn to the plain Word of God, written in any other place of the Scripture, it is a thing most certain that there is not the true understanding and meaning of the Holy Ghost; although that Councils, and Realms, and Nations have approved and received the same."—Article 18 of Confession of Scotland, 1560.

"The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith; and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written, *neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another.*"—Article xx. of Church of England.

From this it is abundantly obvious, that when two interpretations are mutually exclusive and destructive, "it is a thing most certain" that one of them "is not the true understanding and meaning of the Holy Ghost;" and if the Christian conscience cannot in such a case distinguish with certainty the true from the false, it were all the same to the Church, if the Holy Ghost had never spoken, or spoken self-inconsistently, within the body of the Scriptures. The Westminster Divines, having enumerated the Books of the Old and New Testaments, add,

"All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life."—Ch. I. II.

"The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture, (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."—IX.

"The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient

writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."—X.

Let these statements now be compared with Chapter xx. Section II.

"God alone is lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also."

These two quotations will bear this inference, that to profess to believe "out of conscience," that to be taught in the Bible which is not taught there, "is to betray true liberty of conscience." To admit that in one case we may believe, *unavoidably*, that to be taught in the Word of God which is not taught there, is to destroy all confidence of having in one instance obtained the true interpretation.

There appears, therefore, to be some reason for affirming, that the current notion which pleads that contrary interpretations of the Word of God may be both conscientiously adopted,—that both of them may on that account be blameless and legitimate, and hence offer an unexceptionable or justifiable basis for the formation of diverse Christian denominations, is most probably a recent and strange dogma in ecclesiastical history. Whatever the standard authors of the Church may have written to sustain this notion, they have written more to invalidate and overthrow it. In its full modern development it is

entirely new. Even though it were old, and hoary, and catholic, to declare it to be false, is demanded by the fundamental axiom of Protestantism, by the primary convictions of the human mind, and by "the first principles of the oracles of God." Any other view of the matter is entirely incompatible with such Scriptures as the following:—"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ." Phil. i. 9, 10.

To practise what is wrong, is not so bad as deliberately to defend it. The fallacy which has been too long characteristic of the practice of the Protestant community, has become characteristic of the principles of the Evangelical Alliance. This great institution has come forward in the nineteenth century, and after challenging the attention of Christendom and the world, has by her constitution and proceedings, as we have seen, endorsed and sanctioned the transparent error, which till then was acted upon, but scarcely or seldom advocated. This too she has done, in the professed and well-meant endeavour, not only to expose the practical evils of this common prejudice, but even to emancipate the Church from their thraldom.

When the early Reformers denied the infallibility of the Church of Rome, they could not, and they felt that they could not, have stood before their adversaries in argument for a single hour, unless they had not only asserted the objective infallibility of the Word of God, but also shown in what way a subjective infallible interpretation of the Word can be obtained. This way they pointed

out, as we have just seen, by maintaining, that the honest and diligent study of the Bible, with the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit, would undoubtedly and invariably lead to the assured knowledge of its true meaning. Their doctrine was, that every man and woman enjoyed the privilege, and lay under the obligation, of attaining by the direct personal perusal of the Holy Scriptures such an interpretation thereof as, though not extending to all the meaning in the Bible and therefore complete or perfect, would be, so far as it did extend, absolutely infallible. This was what was meant by their common maxim, "The Bible is its own interpreter,"—a maxim, which cannot be construed to mean anything less than this, but which has of late been almost forgotten; since the truth that it embodies has been so often impugned. This fact is perhaps characteristic of the religion of the age. At any rate, to contend for the right of private judgment is beating the air, unless it be true that the *due exercise* of that right leads to an unerring interpretation of the Bible. These were the sentiments of the men who gave liberty to Europe. The self-interpreting power of the Scriptures, as involving the infallible interpretation thereof by the conscientious reader, they held, not merely as an empty theory, or as a dialectical foil, but as an incontrovertible and inestimable fact,—as indeed the very strength and marrow of their life in Christ.

Such being the aspect of the case, a sure and decisive criterion or test of the genuineness of any asserted unerring interpretation will most plainly be found in the harmonious judgments of honest, and independent, and devout minds. "The sense of Scripture is not manifold, but one."

That one authentic sense may be missed or unknown for a season, but cannot be perverted or reversed by any reader of single eye, and of good and honest heart, who depends upon Divine assistance. This position, be it remembered, is the very corner-stone of Protestantism ; *and was professed to be such by the very men who laid its foundations.* Hence the interpretations of those who read their Bibles aright must be so far at one and harmonious, as to be free from jarring and discordant notes.

Moreover, the Bible is not simply a revelation of a few elementary truths, which some persons have thought proper to denominate essentials, or things necessary to salvation. The Word of God is a rule of faith and life, the *only* rule, a *complete* rule, an *infallible* rule: not, however, as superseding, but as supplementing conscience. Whatever in the Bible is mysterious, let it be known and acknowledged to be mysterious. Whatever is difficult, to be difficult; whatever is doubtful, to be doubtful; whatever is clear, to be clear. But to admit, as is so commonly and so easily done, now-a-days, that interpretations of Scripture, which have been found by those who read it *as they can, and as they ought to read it,* may run counter to each other, and come into collision, is ingloriously to strike the flag of the Reformation in the very sight of the Papal host,—it is not merely to leave the well-contested and impregnable citadel of the Protestantism of the sixteenth century; it seems almost like the infatuation of firing the magazine, and exposing that very citadel to the danger of total ruin.

It does, indeed, seem to be high time that the sons of Zion should gird themselves to the present conflict. Let

the old banners be unfurled: *Christ the King and Head of the Church*,—whose laws are embodied in the Bible, and in the Bible alone. *The Bible, and the Bible alone,—the rule of faith and life*,—the *religion of Christians*,—which is accordingly to be examined and studied by every man in the exercise of the right of private judgment. *The Right of Private Judgement*,—which is only a false and deceptive light unless exercised conscientiously and in dependence on Divine aid; but which, when so exercised, leads to an assured belief in the Bible, and to its infallible interpretation, for, to the candid and upright, the Bible is its own witness and its own interpreter.

Hence, if the right of private judgment be abused, and men profess conscientiously to find in the Bible what is not there, conscience is thereby dishonoured, and the integrity of the Bible is virtually impaired, and the supremacy of Christ is, in fact, invaded. To preserve the Kingship of the Saviour untouched, to maintain inviolate the authority of His Word, and to keep the sacredness of conscience undefiled, Christians must avoid contrary and conflicting interpretations of the Scriptures; in other words, they must march together under the one banner, which is the complement and combination of every other that has ever led them on to victory,—bearing this inscription:—

The Unity of the Faith.

II.—*Hortatory.*

The argument is now closed. It has been our aim to express, briefly yet distinctly, the sentiments which we have been led to adopt. We have also sedulously endeavoured to meet with all fairness every objection or difficulty, with which we are acquainted, and which is apparently at variance with these sentiments.

The great practical design, with a view to which we have been labouring, is to persuade our fellow-Christians to reperuse their Bibles, under the conviction, that as the Bible does not contradict itself, incompatible interpretations of the Bible may be, and ought to be, avoided.

We may again reiterate the statement that this conclusion is not opposed to the maxim, "Unity in the midst of diversity;" but is intended to place that maxim in its own proper light, and to set around it due limits. There are, we admit, a thousand varying circumstances all exercising a certain control over our opinions. From the influences that country, climate, temperament, education, and so forth, hold over our minds, in moulding our prevailing sentiments and directing our tastes and habitual feelings, it were vain to expect to escape, and as foolish as it is vain. But there is abundance of room for the manifestation of an indefinite amount of diversity, not only in the innumerable questions that the human mind cannot precisely determine, and in those which in their very nature do not admit of a categorical and rigid determination, but also in the mode of dealing with those truths which are clear as

the sun, and, while more enduring than the mechanism of the heavens, are as definite and exact as its movements. The same truth may surely be viewed in different relations; it may be seen in various aspects; it may be illustrated and adorned by a thousand colourings and by ten thousand phases. But if diversity be consistent with unity, unity must be held intact. To allow that variety in the human constitution, or diversity of situation, can legitimately sanction the confounding of right with wrong, or truth with error, is to leave us only a maimed, and shrivelled, and worthless unity.

When we contemplate the face of nature, we are impressed with the conviction, that it displays "Unity in the midst of diversity." Every leaf resembles its brother-leaf, and yet no two are perfectly identical. All the fishes of the sea have certain properties in common, and each has something that can be called its own. The stars are all glorious, but one star differeth from another star in glory. Shape and colour are common to every material existence; but who can delineate the endless forms, or paint the countless colours, of the material universe. So it is, so it will be, so it ought to be in morals and religion. Every man will have his own way of marshalling the details of a long argument, of acting out a particular principle, of stating a fact, of urging an appeal, of telling a story, of expressing his love, and so on, without limit. But to affirm or insinuate, that the beautiful diversity to be expected in morals and Christianity includes contradictory opinions and clashing sentiments on affairs of moment, is more extravagant far, and far more disastrous and disgraceful too, than to affirm that there is no difference

between the fowl and the fish, or no diversity between water and fire.

The human mind is like the human countenance. The features of each man can be distinguished from the features of every other man. Marvellous wisdom! Millions and millions and millions of the human face divine, all alike, and yet all perceptibly different! How absurd, then, to think of fashioning in one mould, or grinding to one angle, or measuring by one line, living and immortal souls, when the material and perishing index of that soul is so unceasingly metamorphosed by change of colour, size, shape, and proportion. This is an absurdity so great, that there are not many others to be compared with it. There is at least one other as great, and that is, to confound the face of a brute, with the face of a man. To pretend that antagonistic convictions in regard to Scripture doctrines and sacred duties are only like the diverse features of the human countenance, is about as reasonable as to identify mankind with the monkeys, and baboons, and orangs of the African desert.

Our Conclusion, then, it will be said, is nothing more than an empty truism. It needs no explanation and no defence; it is the acknowledged opinion of universal Christendom. We could not have spoken so boldly, if we had not been deeply persuaded, that the principle on which the whole of our argument hinges, is as unassailable as it is perspicuous; that it is in fact a fundamental truth of Christianity and common sense.

We now ask the careful and impartial reader to judge for himself, before coming to the conclusion that we have been only lashing the waves, whether or not we have suc-

ceeded in proving, that this same clear and incontrovertible and elementary truth has not been forgotten when it ought to have been remembered, ignored when it ought to have been acknowledged, and denied when it ought to have been defended, by many of the most intelligent and influential men in the Christian community. Our principles forbid us to ask any quarter for our own errors; but let no one quarrel with our discussions, or harp on some minor faults found in our method of procedure, if it has been shewn that there is some accuracy in our averment, that this catholic, and cardinal, and primary, and transparent truth, is not only set aside, and set at naught, perverted, distorted and traversed by the habitual sectarianism and spiritual sloth of the great mass of our Protestant people, but also, and as one chief cause of this general degeneracy, that it has been cleverly mangled and ingeniously mystified (we do not say intentionally, God forbid) by those, who have become the guides of the unlearned and the expounders and advocates of Christian Union. And let it also be noted, that all this grievous outrage on a great first principle not only of the oracles of God, but of human reason itself, has been perpetrated, and is to this hour vindicated, under the august and sacred plea of conscience and conscientiousness.

May we be allowed, before finally parting with our readers, to press the argument home to a practical and personal issue. Those who can agree as to the import of some portions of the word of God, are under no necessity to disagree and oppose each other as to the meaning of any portion whatever. When human minds can freely and intelligently coalesce in what the Bible affirms re-

specting the person of Christ and the perfection of His atoning sacrifice, there is no valid and sufficient reason why they should come into collision in regard to what the Bible teaches respecting the duty of the civil magistrate. Critics may, indeed, entertain diverse, and even conflicting, views as to the interpretation of 1 Cor. xi. 10, and such like passages; but who would rest an item of his creed or a rule of life on texts so hard to be understood, and what sensible commentator would assert positively and dogmatically that his interpretation is the only true one? In such cases, wise men content themselves with indicating where they think the highest probability lies.

An intelligent and responsible creature, because he is finite, must always be *ignorant* of many things, but he will *err* on no point, so long as he is free from sin. Liability to sin and err and contradict each other belongs, not to our reason itself, but to us as accountable beings, a main part of our accountability consisting in the use, right or wrong, which we make of our reason. If reason itself were fallible, we could not be held responsible for the exercise of it. This liability to err is strongly and grievously enhanced by the depravity of human nature; but to change this liability or tendency, however strong it may be, into a rigid necessity and irresistible proneness, even on one question, is to extinguish man's intelligence and rob him of responsibility.

Man's responsibility extends to every action of his life, and God's authority encircles every expression of His will. If men are to be held culpable for misreading any one text, they cannot be innocent when misreading any other; unless we have a second revelation to teach us how to

divide or bisect the first. To pervert what God affirms of human nature in its sinfulness is blameworthy;—how then can he be exculpated who perverts what God has declared about the government of His Church? No one can plead holy Scripture in defence of any error, without distorting some of the words of the Most High. Every act of such distortion is not, of course, equally criminal; but the very least transgression of the kind is heinous enough. Such criminality is plainly incurred by the one or the other of the two parties who appeal to the Bible against each other's principles or practice. Unless then we reject the Bible as palpably delusive or hopelessly dark,—unless we are prepared to abandon our profession of Christianity, on the ground that men cannot intelligently concur in the meaning of its inspired document, we must admit that it is within the power of Christ's disciples, and therefore obligatory upon them all, to unite in the one true reading or import of every doctrine which God has revealed for their instruction and of every command which He has issued for their obedience.

The plea of human weakness and corruption cannot excuse the sceptic for treating the word of God like the shastres of Hindustan or the alcoran of the Arabian prophet. This plea will not avail the Papist in placing the canons of Trent on a level with the counsels of Jehovah. Nor will it prove valid in the hands of sectarian Protestants to justify them in upholding the antagonistic conclusions which they profess to draw from the pure and perfect record of Divine revelation.

No man, we most assuredly believe, can disentangle himself from any of his religious errors without the hea-

venly aid of the Holy Spirit. The infidel cannot detect the fallacies of his reason which have been leading him captive, nor break through the adamantine crust of icy prejudice within which his soul has lain congealed, till the Spirit of grace rectify and strengthen his understanding, and send a vital glow of spiritual health through his torpid sensibilities. The slave of priestly despotism cannot throw off the incubus of ecclesiastical tradition that has been steadily accumulating through many generations, nor emerge from the dark dungeon of papal superstition that has been dug by the toil of emaciated devotees and is locked by the key of infallibility, until the good Spirit of the Lord infuse a higher life into his frame and new vigour into his limbs, and pour into his heart "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The poor heathen idolater cannot understand the invisible things of God, "even his eternal power and Godhead," by the things that are made, nor open his shrivelled heart to "the glad tidings of great joy," except the Holy Ghost rend the thick veil of centuries from his eyes, purge his mental vision, and swell his contracted spirit with the expanding hopes of a blessed immortality. Neither the creature of fashion nor the victim of vice can break the silken cords of their fascinating thraldom, unless they be endowed with power from on high. And so likewise, most undoubtedly, the followers of the Lamb,—those who have been baptized into His sufferings and made conformable unto His death, cannot extricate themselves from one of their remaining errors, nor explore a new turn in the labyrinth of their own heart's deceitfulness, nor expose and expel one single prejudice from their understanding,

except in so far as they know the power of Christ's resurrection, when His flesh was "quickened by the Spirit." 1 Pet. iii. 18.

But, then, if "the power of the Holy Ghost," be available, most freely and without any restriction of time or place, to the sceptic whose heart is like the trodden wayside, or to the ultramontanist who has drank deeply of the wine of spiritual fornication, or to the deluded polytheist who professes to believe in three hundred and thirty millions of gods, or to the man who is bankrupt in social character, or to the most respectable devotee of the world in civilized life—is the same power of the Holy Ghost less available,—less frequently or less fully available to those, who believe that "God is, and that he is the rewarder of them who diligently seek Him," who have never tasted of "the golden cup full of abominations and filthiness," who worship "the living and true God" "in spirit and in truth," who keep themselves unspotted from the world, because "the love of Christ constraineth" them, that they "should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again?"

And if "the power of the Spirit of God" be sufficient, and much more than sufficient, to take away the stone from the place where the spiritually dead are lying; if at the word of the Lord God, breath comes from the four winds, and breathes upon the slain that they live; is that same power not sufficient to give more vitality and fresh vigour to the souls which it has already quickened? "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." (Rom. v. 10.) Is it no longer

true that the disciples of Christ receive of His fulness, even grace in addition to grace? (See John i. 16). Have modern professors of the gospel never possessed, or have they lost, the assurance of which Paul speaks so emphatically—"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ?"

If Divine grace can soften and remove the hard and obdurate prejudices of the atheist against his Maker and Redeemer and effect a hallowed reconciliation, can it not dissolve and dissipate every prepossession and misconception that alienate from each other the hearts of brother-believers? If the Spirit of Truth can undo the tense warping and rectify the stubborn bias of the priest-ridden soul, persuading the perishing sinner willingly to cast away the brittle thread of human tradition and decrees as unable to save him from sinking into the depths of perdition, and gladly to embrace the hope set before him in the gospel, can that truth-teaching Spirit also not correct the errors of the freemen of the Lord, untwisting the cords of bigotry by which they are still fettered, and refuting the foregone conclusions by which they are separated from each other? The life-giving Spirit of God can renew the gross heart of the Mohammedan fatalist, and the proud spirit of the Hindu Brahmin, and the savage nature of the Australian cannibal, and dispose them to love the Christian Scriptures, and enable them to draw thence life and peace and salvation. Shall it be said that the same Divine agent must leave his sacred work on the human heart unfinished? Is He not able, and ready too, to carry on the process of

renewal in every heart in which it has been begun, to such a degree, that his sanctified people shall read the Bible with so much veneration and devout conscientiousness, as to refrain from imputing to God what God has not spoken? No more is needed than this, along with an extensive and deep diffusion of brotherly love, to restore concord to the distracted counsels of the Church, and heal every breach in her visible unity.

Seeing then that it is altogether within the limit of the capabilities of Christians, with the offered help of the Holy Ghost, to abstain from turning their own opinions and fancies into pretended oracles of heaven, so to abstain is clearly and strongly obligatory upon them all. If this abstinence were universally practised, conflicting and jarring interpretations of the Holy Scriptures would cease to prevail. There might be, and there would be, different degrees of knowledge and attainment, and varying aspects of the same topic, but antagonistic conclusions on weighty questions would disappear. For in every pair of antagonistic conclusions one of them must be wrong. And to plead Divine authority and inspiration in support of what is not really found in the Bible, because God never put it there, is surely not unlike the act of one putting himself in the place of God. So long, therefore, as contradictory and clashing interpretations of the Bible, (one half of which at least must be erroneous) are found extensively among evangelical Protestants, it is plain that no small portion of their religion, as it actually exists, is not drawn from the inspired volume. It is no doubt the profession of the Reformed Churches, that "the Bible, and the Bible alone, is their religion." To a very great extent, we re-

joice to say, is this profession carried out vigorously and consistently into practice. It is, doubtless, the paramount wish of every honest and intelligent Protestant to carry it out unswervingly in every action of his life. In the strong assurance of this, we make our present appeal to every brother who adheres to the Protest against Popery. Let our profession of absolute subjection to the word of God become a great and visible reality. Let us shew that we reverence the Bible, by ceasing to hurl its texts, as weapons of war, against each other. Let us prove that we believe the word of God to be throughout and entirely self-consistent, by the mutual consistency of our interpretations. In basing our incompatible dogmas on the Bible, we in effect make it contradict itself.

The very dullest of our adversaries know that there can be only one divinely instituted form of church government, that both Calvinism and Arminianism, as commonly taught, cannot both be inculcated in the Word of God, and that the duty of the civil magistrate in regard to Christianity is so important, that if the Bible does not speak of it, and speak of it plainly too, the Bible cannot be a perfect rule of faith and life. Now then so long as those who boast of following the Bible, of following it only, and of following it fully, shall continue to adhere to their present irreconcileable and exclusive sentiments on these grave questions, and shall at the same time cast defiantly against each other's positions the living oracles of God, it is not quite fair for them to join together and exclaim: "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is our religion." They cannot make this their watch-word and battle-cry, in advancing together against their common foes, without bringing re-

proach upon their cause, since their conflicts so often bring confusion into their counsels.

If Protestant Christians, then, would recommend the sacred volume in all its untold preciousness and stainless glory to the heathen world; if they would do what they can to rescue it from the flippant blasphemy of the vulgar scorner, and from the subtle poison of the learned sceptic, and to recommend it to the jaded eye of fashionable frivolity; if they would exert themselves to expunge the Bible from the *index expurgatorum*, till that *index* shall be obliterated altogether, and elevate the record of truth immeasurably high above papal briefs and ecclesiastical canons—let them diligently see to it that they make the oracle of God utter but one response. Let the Protestant evangelical Church cease to be, to any large extent, a second Babel. Let their "conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ, . . . standing fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Phil. i. 27.

But it may now be said, that in the fervour of appeal the right of private judgment is forgotten. The high prerogative which every man possesses of judging in every question for himself is not overlooked, but vindicated. The sacredness of this prerogative is not desecrated by our argument, but displayed and defended; while its obligation is not impaired, but enhanced. It is an equal folly to squander an estate piecemeal on trifles, as to sell it all at once for a bauble. The pruning-hook may as well, (if not better) lie and rust in inactivity, as cut off from the stem fruit-bearing branches. What honourable difference is there between prostrating our

private judgment before a disciplined priest, and prostituting it to a hereditary prejudice?

When the right of private judgment is not used discreetly and devoutly, its abuse entails guilt upon its possessor, and becomes a bane to the community. It is easy to aver that this right has been honestly employed, when it fact it has been dishonourably betrayed. It were better with the papist avowedly to disown both its privilege and obligation, and to glory in the certainty and security of implicit faith, than with many a Protestant to boast of the privilege and to profess fidelity to the obligation, and then in actual conduct to disobey the one and to disgrace the other.

To affirm that the prerogative of private judgment, rightly used, may mislead an individual, is to empty it of all honour and eviscerate it of all authority. Let men believe as the Church believes, rather than by mental travail seek for wisdom as silver in the mine of inspiration, if indeed it be true that at the very time they trust their own judgment most securely, they *may be* most sorely deceived. A man *must* repose confidence in his own understanding at least sometimes. When he is prepared to do so, as having no other alternative, he should exercise his intellectual powers with due caution. Assured trust in our own judgment is not at variance with the injunctions of sacred Scripture. It is true that "the way of man is not in himself," Jer. x. 23. And there is much need for the exhortation: "Be not wise in your own conceits," Rom. xii. 16. These and all similar passages refer to the forming of opinions in a careless and indevout temper of mind. We are to beware of leaning unto our own

understanding, *without* trusting in the Lord with all our heart. But while trusting in the Lord with all our heart, we have nothing else to lean unto but our own understanding.

Private judgment, then, when exercised in a godly and conscientious manner *must be* trusted sometimes at least, otherwise religion and truth and duty are all a troubled dream or a tragic myth. When private judgment is exercised in the same godly and conscientious manner, why should it misguide us at all—why may it not be trusted always? There does not, therefore, appear to be any way of avoiding the inference, that when Christians *oppose* each other in their religious convictions, and drag the Word of God into the conflict to support their antagonistic views, one or other, at least, of the two parties must be held as blamably abusing the right of private judgment.

When, it will be asked, will the generality of professing Christians exercise their conscience and judgment, in so careful and devout a manner, as to avoid collision on any of the doctrines or duties of their holy faith as taught in Scripture? A previous question is, *ought* they to do so? Some will be ready to reply, admitting that they ought, they cannot, and a perfect church is not to be expected upon earth. This plea is equally available for every infirmity of human nature; and has in fact been used times innumerable, by individuals in the church and out of it, to defend their conduct, when the veil of self-deception woven around their besetting sin has been torn away. The drunkard ought to reform, but he cannot. The backslider ought to repent, but he cannot. The heretic ought

to recant, but he cannot. The sceptic ought to believe, but he cannot. The Protestant who wrests some portions of the Word of God, ought to read them aright, but he cannot. "Behold, there was a man which had his hand withered." He could not, therefore, lift it up for good or evil. But the Lord Jesus said unto him: "Stretch forth thine hand." How readily might the man have answered: "Because thou commandest me, I ought; but since my hand is withered, I cannot?" Had this been his reply, his hand would never have been "restored whole, like as the other." In his effort to obey the command of Christ, Christ communicated the requisite power. It is true of every sinner in regard to his every duty, that he cannot, while yet he can. In himself he cannot; in Christ, he most assuredly can.

Even though the Protestant Churches were to begin generally and in right good earnest to-day, to endeavour to eliminate from their respective creeds and customs everything anti-scriptural—and every thing anti-scriptural is clearly schismatical—the work would not be finished by one generation. Any honest attempt at a commencement of such an arduous and honourable achievement would itself ensure a rich and immediate and extensive and enduring blessing. Who, then, has the sanctified ambition to be first?

That the reader may be stimulated to gird up his loins with the intent of taking part in this great work, let him ponder such considerations as the following, in addition to what has been already advanced.

Infidelity would invalidate the claims of the Bible to be the Word of God by invalidating the powers of the

human mind, which, by God's appointment, are called to pronounce a verdict on those claims. The trained priesthood of Rome having questioned and set aside the sufficiency of Holy Scripture, are constrained in self-consistency to deny the trustworthiness of private judgment, to which the Bible is constantly appealing. Thus the goal of priestcraft is the starting point of scepticism; and the goal of scepticism is the starting point of priestcraft. We cannot defend the authority and integrity of the Bible, if the unerring accuracy of a genuine conscientiousness be repudiated. Men who dislike the Bible can make an apparent escape from its obligations only by the sacrifice of their own intelligence. So deeply do many hate God's Word, that they hesitate not at this extravagant sacrifice. It matters little whether this sacrifice be offered at the altar of a corrupt church, or at the altar of a sham philosophy. It is nearly the same thing to reject the Bible on account of the incompetency of reason, as to cashier reason of her competency after rejecting the Bible. As to the modern notion which would render the Bible unnecessary through the superabounding resources of reason, it is a mere intellectual escapade. It is a gourd that has grown up in a day, and will perish in a night.

To defend the present system of Protestant denominationalism, or, to exculpate both parties who find or fancy irreconcileable mandates in the statute-book of heaven, is clearly to leave the narrow road of truth, and to get entangled among the delusions of those who have room enough in the broad road of error to play at see-saw between scepticism and superstition. The infallibility of

God's Word and the validity of man's reason must ever go hand in hand. The sacredness of conscience and the sufficiency of the Scriptures cannot be divorced. If conflicting convictions which are both avowedly based upon the Bible be innocent and legitimate, this divorce is proclaimed and effected. Then conscience has lost her honour, and the Bible is bereft of authority. Both fall by the same blow. When the Christian community, then, is distracted and torn, as it is undoubtedly at present, by contradicting interpretations of the Word of God in regard to weighty questions, the assaults which may be directed against the strongholds of the Man of Sin, with the efforts which may be made to reclaim the swamps of infidelity, will not only be seriously diverted, or even sometimes paralysed, but will also divulge the shame and weakness of the professing Church.

Moreover, when the Word of the Most High God is bandied about by contending factions in support of their respective dogmas, where is, practically, the acknowledgment of Christ's headship over the Church? To distort or dispute the commands and lessons of the Bible is virtually to set aside the supremacy of Christ Himself. To palliate the conduct, and plead for the genuine conscientiousness, of both the parties in any such case, is by the most obvious inference, tantamount in fact, to insubordination to the crown rights of Emmanuel. When two Christians, then, stand before the world, in opposition to each other, each challenging for his own cause and peculiarity the august sanction of God's written revelation, to defend and exonerate both of them is in effect the same, though it may not be intended, as to tarnish the glory of Christ's

mediatorial crown, and to restrict the sway of His benignant, blood-bought sceptre.

The Unity of the Faith, as we have been endeavouring to expound it, thus appears to be identified with every high and holy Christian interest. While Christian Union is indispensable, as is now generally admitted, to the extension and security, no less than to the symmetry, of the living temple, our aim has been to show that in order to a sure and healthy union, it is necessary, as it is obviously most becoming, that those Christians who find opposing doctrines or duties in the Bible, endeavour by prayer and conference, and the large and continual exercise of fervent brotherly kindness and charity, to reduce their differences, till they shall see eye to eye, and with the gracious aid of the promised Spirit of Truth, be united in the one true meaning of the pure Word of the living God.

To be content to attempt nothing for the promotion of harmony and combination among the distracted followers of the Lamb, in these perilous times, betrays either the apathy of spiritual torpor or the cowardice of an unbelieving backsliding heart. To endeavour to promote Christian union in contravention of the principle that has been advanced, seems to us to be little better than consolidating our divisions, and sowing fresh seeds of discord.

When the disciples shall fully awake to a sense of their lofty privileges and large responsibility; when they shall begin to revise all their old beliefs, as well as to form their future opinions, under the solemn conviction that if they take due care and cordially believe and plead "the promise of the Father," they will not err; a new era will dawn upon Christendom. Let error in the exercise of

private judgment when learning the lessons of the Bible be sedulously shunned, under the salutary fear that every error of interpretation tends, in proportion to its intrinsic force, to overthrow the supremacy of our kingly Mediator, to damage the consistency and completeness of the written word, and to disparage the trust-worthiness of the understanding, not merely of infidels or idolaters, but of those who have received life and light from the Spirit of the Lord. So long as this principle is not candidly recognised and acknowledged, or so long as a vigorous and honest beginning is still to be made to carry it into practical operation, the Church of the living God will be rent by the collisions of hostile parties, and will consequently be feeble in the presence of her adversaries, and hampered and disorderly in her evangelistic and missionary efforts.

But let Christians begin to retire to their closets and return to their Bibles, with more intelligent and earnest longings for a rich and large effusion of the Holy Ghost; let them reperuse the Scriptures under a fresh and enhanced conviction that the Bible has but one meaning, and that no honest heart or single eye need miss it; let each one feel that by the way in which he personally understands every message of his Master, he either hinders or hastens the kingdom of glory—he either betrays or defends the cause of his crucified Lord before scorners and apostates. A vigorous and ingenuous effort of this sort, steadily made by a few hundred disciples, who should fear a mutual collision in regard to any iota of their Lord's will, far more than they fear poverty or persecution, would be, to the scattered tribes of Israel, like cold water

to a thirsty soul. It would be a genuine and mighty revival.

Fellow-christians! fellow-protestants! begin without delay this hallowed work, this arduous enterprise. To be cordially united in action, we must be honestly one in sentiment. To banish factions from the camp, we must expel divisions from our counsels. "Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment."—(1 Cor. i. 10.)

The Unity of the Faith, and the Union of the Christian Church, are enjoined in the sacred volume in the most express, reiterated, and emphatic terms; as they are, in the estimation of impartial men, most earnestly to be desired, and most reasonably to be expected. No other topic occupies so prominent a place in our Lord's intercessory prayer, as the oneness of His disciples; nor ever seemed to be so weighty a burden upon His spirit, when he "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears." The unbroken harmony of Christians, or the visible union of the Church, is by the testimony of holy Scripture, and the verdict of all experience, by far the mightiest instrument in reviving the community of believers, and in gathering back the wanderers to the fold.

How can we, collectively, adorn any doctrine of God our Saviour, so long as we do not agree, but rather contradict each other, as to the meaning of that doctrine? It cannot but be expected that God will have a contro-

versy with the Protestant Churches, while so many of their leaders and adherents are disingenuously pleading conscience, and Scripture, and obedience to Christ, for various opinions and practices which Christ in His Word actually condemns, and about which conscience was never fairly consulted. When we send a messenger from the schools of the prophets to the heathen, or a Christian apostle to the Mohammedans, or an evangelist to the Jews; when we attempt to purify the moral cess-pools of civilization, or to instruct and elevate the labourers on the line, or the soldiers in the trench, or to cheer the heart of the despairing slave; when we approach the hall of legislation or the executive government with the complaint of some religious grievance; whenever we build a place of worship, or print a tract, or translate the Bible, or discuss an ecclesiastical question, our watchword is ever the same, our motto is never changed—Conscience, Scripture, Christ. These three words are virtually, if not audibly re-echoed from our barracks, hospitals, workhouses, and jails. They are stereotyped on every religious hand-bill, and emblazoned on every copy of the Bible. They are vociferated by the preaching artizan, and melodiously articulated by our mitred and lawn-clad clergy. They take precedence in every sect of its shibboleth or sibboleth. They are taught in our Sabbath schools, expounded in our colleges, and enforced from our pulpits—Conscience, Scripture, Christ!

If then with such a fair form of godliness, we be convicted of a sad deficiency of its power; if it be a fact that multitudes of the professors of the gospel are in direct hostility to each other, on several momentous questions, as

to what Christ really commands them, and what Scripture really teaches them, and that both parties are pleading conscience in support of their conflicting opinions, how can it be surprising that the enemies of the gospel should take occasion to plead conscience too for their denial of Christ and their rejection of Scripture? When conscience is thus abused, and Scripture turned against itself, and Christ the Lord deeply offended, is it wonderful that He should restrain the effusion of His grace, or that the Holy Spirit, the author of the Bible, and the purifier and pacifier of the conscience, should be sorely grieved? The world must see the Church practice, as well as hear her preach, fealty to conscience, reverence for Scripture, and obedience to Christ.

This, then, is the work that is to be done; to roll away a heavy reproach from the Bible, and wipe off a foul stain from the Protestant conscience, and render due homage to the one great head of the Church, by ceasing to throw Scripture into conflict with Scripture, and conscience into conflict with conscience. An obvious and mighty urgency arising from present circumstances and passing events, calls loudly that this work be done, and done without delay. While the Protestant Evangelical Churches are torn by many discordant and incompatible beliefs, and rent into many incongruous and ill-assorted sects and parties, her adversaries are alert and enterprising. There is not, indeed, much vitality or vigour in heathenism, but its enormous extent gives it a momentum of resistance which sorely tries the strength and patience of its assailants. To leaven that corrupt mass of hundreds of millions of idolaters requires not only the associated exertions of a

united Church, but much more that effectual blessing which the supplications of an undivided Church can alone procure. The modern phases of infidelity are as refined and subtle perhaps as in any former time, and have met with proportionate popularity. A fatal scepticism is working powerfully and unseen in most numerous and influential quarters. Without any professed or apparent opposition to religion or Christianity, our literature is steeped in its insinuating spirit; philosophy and science have to a large extent come under its withering blight; fashionable life takes a tone from its approved maxims; and politics are its favourite game. The opinion, so rife among Christians, that conflicting views of truth and duty may be conscientiously espoused and held, has given such a sanction to scepticism and such an impetus to its progress, that for the present it seems almost hopeless to attempt to stem the rolling tide.

It is difficult to say whether some of the avowed principles and many of the practices of the Government of Great Britain, may more correctly be called infidel or popish. To profess sometimes that they will know no difference between Christ and Mohammed, between Jehovah and Brahm, between the Bible and the papal decrees, is the essence of rankest unbelief. At other times to call upon the nation to fast and pray, or give thanks, before God Almighty on account of providential occurrences, is only to add gross inconsistency to unblushing impiety. And then again to obey the behests of a domineering priesthood, and acknowledge the power and succumb to the terrors of an apostate hierarchy, and that too in England, where we had thought, the proud pretensions of Rome

were long ago extinguished in the blood of her martyred sons, manifests a degree of vassalage to spiritual despotism, which every right-hearted patriot will regard as truly alarming.

The multiplicity and variety of the Church's evangelistic machinery is one of the characteristics of the age. We have richly endowed colleges, recondite studies in our universities, and ragged schools for the castaways. There are pithy pointed tracts, in every language and of every form, strong in every argument and winning in every illustration. We have tracts which turn the post-office into a pulpit. The Bible itself has become the commonest and the cheapest book under heaven. The word of God is familiar to children, favoured by the great, fragrant to the good, and fresh to the learned. We have Bibles accessible to the poor, and legible by the blind. There are missionaries sent to every foreign clime, and to every class of the home population. Our benevolent societies have been multiplied, till no case of destitution, and no instance of oppression, and no victim of vice or crime, seems to be excluded from their generous and ample sphere.

This varied and precious instrumentality is by no means fully equal to the work which lies before the Christian community. It doubtless admits of indefinite extension and of much improvement. Nevertheless its existence, even as it is, is a stupendous and auspicious fact. It is unparalleled in the history of mankind; and forms one of the greatest and noblest monuments that will ever adorn this world. Nor have the results of the past working of this machinery been insignificant or worthless. It has by no means proved a failure. Its achievements are numer-

ous and striking and beneficent. On every shore its triumphs are conspicuous and captivating.

Notwithstanding all this, it seems to be deeply felt by God's people at the present time, that the Divine blessing is palpably restrained. In proportion to the amount of means now employed, it sometimes appears unaccountable that success should be so limited. Looking to the quantity and quality of our outward agencies, we have reason to ask, especially when comparing our circumstances with some past eras in the Church, or with the promises of God recorded in the Bible, how is it that our progress is so slow, the conversion of the ungodly so backward and the spirituality of the converted so tame and unimpassioned?

Now if the Bible frequently and forcibly enjoins union upon the disciples of Christ, and plainly intimates that the renovation of society is suspended on the realization of a Christian unity, will it be denied that whatever other causes may be in operation now to check the full effusion of the Holy Spirit, the prevalence of schism and sectarianism in the Protestant community is not one of the least obtrusive or obstructive? When the prophet said of old: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts;" he may have referred directly to the tithes and offerings of corn and wine and oil. But we know that the ancient Jews were much more prone to come short in the spirituality of their services, than in the perfunctory fulfilment of ritualism. "To obey is better than sacrifice." Whatever pungency there may be in an appeal levelled against a dereliction in minor duties, is pro-

portionally enhanced when applied to higher and weightier claims. If then it be an admitted fact that the evangelic and unapostate Churches of the present day have been robbing God of His revenue of glory, by rending the body of Christ, and by recoiling from each other, it needs no straining of the prophetic word to apply it to ourselves. We would take the rebuke humbly, that we might appropriate the promise boldly; "Be of the same mind one toward another," (Rom. xii. 16.) "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous," (1 Pet. iii. 8.) "And prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Mal. iii. 10.)

It will be stoutly maintained that the scheme which proposes to effect, not a compromise, but a reconciliation, between the conflicting sects of Christendom, is the wildest and most impracticable, that has yet been suggested in this age so prolific in extravagancies. To fancy that Calvinists and Arminians may be brought to harmonize in the teaching of Holy Scripture, regarding those topics which have been so long and so keenly contested, will seem to many utterly ridiculous. Nor will it appear less preposterous to desire, that Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Congregationalists, should overcome their hereditary and acquired prejudices and read their Bibles with a single eye, so as to lay aside their differences and be united in the one will of their Master regarding church government. And it will be stigmatised as the very height of folly, that the Christians of Great Britain should be en-

joined and expected to be of one mind and one accord respecting the duty of the civil magistrate in regard to the education of the people.

Some may be waiting for the expression of the author's opinion on these disputed points. They may be thinking that he will say, Now, here is the truth involved in these controversies. I have found it. Let all agree with me in the conclusions to which I have come. To assume such a position as this would only expose us to the just scorn of all intelligent men. How is it that the members of the Evangelical Alliance are united harmoniously in the statements contained in their doctrinal basis? Was it because a Protestant pope arose amongst them, and oracularly delivered his responses, to be re-echoed by ten thousand followers? Is not each member of that Alliance supposed to have personally examined the Bible devoutly and diligently? Is the agreement of all of them in the same truth not accounted for by the fact, that that truth is in the Bible, and that they have all found that truth in the Bible by seeking it there each for himself? To attribute the present accordance and union of evangelical Christians to any other cause, were to invalidate their creed or slander their character. If Christian men, therefore, can attain by due care a certain amount of harmony of opinion as to what their Lord's will really is, why can they not by the same care attain more and more harmony of view in interpreting their Master's precepts, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ?"

"You interpret the Scriptures in one way," said Queen

Mary to John Knox, "and they (the pope and cardinals) in another: whom shall I believe, and who shall be judge?" "You shall believe God, who plainly speaketh in his Word," replied the Reformer, "and farther than the Word teacheth you, you shall believe neither the one nor the other. The Word of God is plain in itself; if there is any obscurity in one place, the Holy Ghost, who is never contrary in himself, explains it more clearly in other places, so that there can remain no doubt, but unto such as are obstinately ignorant." The very same mode of disposing of weighty disputes applies to the Protestants of the present day.

If Arminians and Calvinists cannot come to an agreement, and emerge from a long dark night of bitter controversy into the day-light of Bible truth, it must be either because there is not light in the Bible, or because they will not see that light. The same alternative meets us whatever be the topic in dispute. So far as God has commanded a form of ecclesiastical rule, if we cannot coincide as to what that form is, we make shipwreck either of Christ's command or of the Christian conscience. If a member of her Majesty's Government were to consult his pastor, as to what his duty is in advising the Queen about popular education, and if a pastor in such circumstances could give no advice, it must be either because the Word of God is not a complete canon of faith and duty, or because that pastor is an incompetent expounder of the Word. The Word of God, we may easily assume, does give a distinct and valuable utterance as to what the magistrate may dutifully undertake on behalf of the uneducated masses. Till a considerable majority of Christ's

professing people come to unanimity of sentiment as to what that utterance actually is, there seems to be no possible egress from our present dead-lock of confused counsels, and consequent damage to the commonwealth.

It does not become us to profess to solve these questions so as to reduce to harmony the conflicting opinions of colleges and of centuries. But we do feel called upon to urge on our fellow-Christians this consideration, that it is at once ruinous and scandalous for the disciples of Christ to be perpetually disputing about the meaning of their Master's instructions, and that such disputes may, and ought to be abandoned. These controversies will terminate by the truth being elicited and established, just in proportion to the spiritual and consistent conduct of the members of the Church. A beginning in this direction ought to be made. It is not too much to expect a distinct and emphatic confession of sin in respect to this specific point, from both sides of the respective controversies. True confession would surely be followed by earnest prayer, for such a degree of enlargement and enlightening as would dispel the clouds of error and prevent the shock of opposing parties. And where the minds of ministers and others are not prepared for humble holy conference as to the topics of difference, conjoint acknowledgment of transgression, and fervent supplications at the common throne of grace, would soon prepare the way for unreserved and cordial communion as to every iota of discrepance between them.

Is such a proposal as the above really impracticable? Is it too much for poor human nature? It may be, it *is*, far too much for human nature by itself. But is it too

much for human nature, redeemed by the precious blood of Emmanuel? Is it too much for human nature, sanctified and strengthened by the good spirit of the Lord?

Admitting that this scheme were, at the present time and in sober reality, impracticable, there are some impracticabilities, the urging and attempting of which are of all things the most honourable. To vindicate the truth against a ponderous and overwhelming mass of error, or to defend the right against a crushing tyranny, or to contend for liberty against a triumphant despotism, though unsuccessful, is noble and heroic. The more impracticable the effort, if it be well directed and honestly sustained, the more illustrious will be the amaranthine wreath that will deck the prostrate victor's brow; for in virtue's cause we conquer, when we fall. Leonidas and his three hundred comrades failed in their brave and patriotic attempt. But their defeat at Thermopylæ has done more good to the world, than their success would have done to Greece. Their death-daring courage in a righteous cause still thrills through every land of liberty.

The rising at Pentland, and the battle of Bothwell, by the Scottish Covenanters, were impracticable outbursts of zeal. That too is the worst charge that can be brought against them. If those abortive efforts of our martyred sires are to be condemned, it can only be on the ground that they were unsuccessful *at the time.* They were ultimately crowned with success. We verily believe that the patient endurance of bloody deaths and cruel tortures by our forefathers, numbering 18,000 who suffered by fine, or imprisonment, or exile, or death, during twenty-eight years, did far more to bring about the revolution of 1688,

than the arms of the Prince of Orange, or the time-serving tergiversation of the bishops and nobles and people, who swore and foreswore, as the tide of power or feeling ebbed and flowed. If Cameron and Renwick were substantially wrong, then was the revolution itself a crime, and the league of Smalcald in 1530, which proved the foundation of German liberty and religion, was treason and apostacy combined. But the Cameronians were unsuccessful. Their schemes were ill-timed and ill-conducted. True; but this does not prove them guilty. If we admit that they were sometimes imprudent, we claim a higher meed of praise to their memories, for their noble daring and their martyr-spirit, which at such fearful odds, and under such accumulated and aggravated wrongs and calamities, maintained to the last the cause of truth and honesty. Their chief encomium lies in this, that by their attempting what was impracticable, and perishing in the attempt, they made it practicable to others.

Granting, then, that it is utterly and entirely impracticable at present to get Christians to treat the Bible as they ought to do, *to take out of it only what God has put into it*, the object is so simple and so good and so beneficial, that in labouring for it, there is honour and happiness; every defeat and every difficulty will only enhance the reward of the faithful labourer; and if success be delayed, its attainment will be all the more certain, and its glory all the more refulgent when it is vouchsafed.

But there are some things that, though impracticable in appearance, are not so in reality. We have been collecting arguments to shew that such is the nature of the proposal now made, that the soldiers of the Cross should

cease to debate about the meaning of their marching orders. While they all profess to believe that there is neither ambiguity nor inconsistency in these orders, as issued by the captain of their salvation, is it indeed extravagant to expect that they should all read them as they are written, and understand them as they were meant? When the stripling David went against the giant Goliath, his attempt *seemed* impracticable. But it was not; the stone from the brook was mightier than the spear like a weaver's beam. When Luther went to the diet at Worms, his attempt *appeared* impracticable and hopeless to every one but himself. It was in reply to the expostulations of Spalatin, the confidential adviser of the Elector of Saxony, that Luther said—"Go tell your master, that though there should be as many devils at Worms as there are tiles on its roofs, I would enter it." Though he had presently to flee for his life from Worms, he was the conqueror at the diet. When Carey, the poor uneducated shoemaker, attempted, on behalf of India, what was forbidden by Government, and neglected by those who claimed to be the successors of the Apostles, and ridiculed by the learned and influential, and had been abandoned by others as hopeless, his enterprise *seemed* to be most wild and desperate. What enterprise has proved more sober or successful? Even in matters of smaller import, the apparent and the actual are often opposed. The British House of Commons laughed to scorn the locomotive projects and predictions of George Stephenson, as unheard of and unattainable; and in a very short time the laugh was turned against that Honourable House of Legislation. In like manner, *whatever apparent* impracticability there

may be in the proposal to guide the vessel of the Christian Church by the chart of revelation, and to expel denominationalism from the vast and growing empire of Emmanuel, and to exorcise the demons of strife that are so numerous in Protestant Christendom, the seeming impossibility of doing all this is not a reality and a substance, but only a mist, a vapour, a delusion.

To every one who would excuse or shield the present state of the Church, without answering or refuting the preceding arguments, because of the difficulties and embarrassments involved in effecting an improvement, might be addressed the words which Samson is represented as using to Delilah :—

> "Weakness is thy excuse,
> And I believe it; weakness to resist
> Philistian gold: if weakness may excuse,
> What murderer, what traitor, parricide,
> Incestuous, sacrilegious, but may plead it?
> All wickedness is weakness; that plea, therefore,
> With God or man will gain thee no remission."

The Church, alas! has oftentimes, like Samson, lost her greater than a giant's strength, through sloth and low indulgences and self-elation; while rebuking them that may have tempted her, let her be as honest as the blind and fallen hero of Israel was, and say,—

> "I gave, thou say'st, the example,
> I led the way; bitter reproach, but true;
> I to myself was false, ere thou to me;
> Such pardon, therefore, as I give my folly,
> Take to thy wicked deed."

The achievement for which we are contending *is* possible. It is *practicable;* but only to them that believe. "To him that believeth all things are possible." To the ten spies and their fellow-countrymen it seemed impracticable to conquer the Canaanites, with their giant defenders and their towns walled up to heaven. And because it *seemed* impracticable, it *was* impracticable. Their bodies fell in the wilderness, and their bones were left to bleach there, *because of their unbelief.* Joshua and Caleb alone, among the armed and marshalled multitude, saw nothing impracticable in the stature of the Anakim and their proud fortifications, and to these two heroes alone, of all their compeers in the desert, a triumphant entrance was given to the possession of the promised land.

Shall we, then, believe in one divinely-appointed Church, or in a multiform party-Church? Shall we believe in a divided caste-Church, or in the united Catholic Church? Shall we believe in the communion of rival classes, or in the communion of loving Christians? Shall we believe in the communion of sectaries, or in the communion of saints?

I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints. Lord, help thou mine unbelief!

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